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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THEMATIC AFFINITIES IN THE DRAMA OF  
SARTRE AND UNAMUNO: LES MOUCHES AND LA ESFINGE

by



JOSE M. ALONSO

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Thematic Affinities in the Drama of Sartre and Unamuno: Les Mouches and La esfinge", submitted by José M. Alonso in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.





## ABSTRACT

The present study deals with the affinities and dissimilarities found between Sartre's Les Mouches and Unamuno's La esfinge as these authors treat the themes of freedom and of man's loss of innocence. Chapter I concerns itself with an analysis of Les Mouches. In Chapter II the themes of freedom and man's loss of innocence are analysed in La esfinge, and compared and contrasted with the themes in Les Mouches. Chapter III answers the question: Can Les Mouches and La esfinge be considered tragedies in the light of ancient Greek as well as modern European concepts of tragedy?

It can be concluded that in both Les Mouches and La esfinge man is free to choose his acts and his values. Man's inherent freedom alienates him from nature, and therefore he suffers anguish. He loses his innocence as he becomes aware of his freedom. In Les Mouches Oreste refuses to subordinate himself to either God or man, while in La esfinge Angel willingly submit to God's will. Man is not evil in Les Mouches, but free. In La esfinge man is evil insofar as he does not submit to God. Oreste faces his freedom with responsibility, whereas Angel wishes to return to innocence and God. Both plays can be considered tragedies inasmuch as they assert the value of life in spite of its inherent suffering.





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J. M. A.



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## INTRODUCTION



It is surprising that, up to the present time, attempts to compare and contrast the works of Unamuno and Sartre have been almost non-existent.<sup>1</sup> There are striking parallels in the careers of these two men. Both were engaged in the politics of their times: Sartre was a prisoner of war, Unamuno was subjected to exile from his country. In addition, they wrote extensively on philosophical problems, and made outstanding contributions in the development of contemporary thought, particularly existentialist thought. Both became in turn journalist, novelist, and playwright.

Generally, Existentialists are divided into two main groups: the Christian variety and the atheist. Unamuno is currently regarded as one of the major precursors of Christian Existentialism, Paul Foulquié explains the relationship between Christian thought and modern existentialism:

There is no cause for astonishment in the Christian origins of modern existentialism. Christianity ... gives rise ... to states of the soul which correspond to the existentialist attitude, the sense of existence, of responsibility, of anguish,<sup>2</sup> of astonishment in face of the irrational<sup>2</sup>

All these aspects of existentialism are apparent in Unamuno's works, and according to Paul Ilie constitute his originality:

The issues that he raised concerning consciousness, anguish, death, transcendence, and personality anticipate the more systematic -- and less vital -- analyses of Heidegger, Buber, Jaspers,





and Sartre. Although the latter have been recognized as the leaders of modern existentialism, Unamuno wrote well in advance of their philosophies, and specifically enough to be considered more than just a precursor.<sup>3</sup>

The way Unamuno faces the problem of God should be kept in mind at all times. He discards the philosophical concept of God deduced from logic or rational thought:

El Dios lógico, racional, el ens summum, el primum movens, el Ser Supremo de la filosofía teológica ... no es más que una idea de Dios, algo muerto.<sup>4</sup>

Unamuno is interested in the living God:

Los atributos del Dios vivo, del Padre de Cristo, hay que deducirlos de su revelación histórica en el Evangelio y en la conciencia de cada uno de los creyentes cristianos, y no de razonamientos metafísicos que sólo llevan al Dios-Nada de Escoto Eriugena, al Dios racional o panteísta, al Dios ateo, en fin, a la Divinidad despersonalizada.

Y es que al Dios vivo, al Dios humano, no se llega por camino de razón, sino por camino de amor y de sufrimiento. La razón nos aparta más bien de Él.

.....

Dios mismo, no ya la idea de Dios, puede llegar a ser una realidad inmediatamente sentida; y aunque no nos expliquemos con su idea ni la existencia ni la esencia del universo, tenemos a las veces el sentimiento directo de Dios, sobre todo en los momentos de ahogo espiritual. Y este sentimiento, obsérvese bien, porque en esto estriba todo lo trágico de él y el sentimiento trágico de toda la vida, es un sentimiento de hambre de Dios, de carencia de Dios. Creer en Dios es, en primera instancia, y como veremos, querer que haya Dios, no poder vivir sin Él.<sup>5</sup>



Clearly enough, Unamuno has in mind two different concepts of God. He rejects the God of the theologians as false. Unamuno appeals to the living God, the One who lives in man because the latter wants Him to exist. This is the God of Unamuno, the God of Faith.

All the evidence points to the fact that Unamuno was primarily a Christian existentialist. His work can, therefore, be viewed from that standpoint, even though for Ilie Unamuno stands closer in method to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche than he is to Heidegger, Jaspers, and Sartre. But, continues Ilie, "...while he recapitulates the ideas of the former two, he anticipates the concerns if not the actual solutions of the latter three..."<sup>6</sup>

It would be preposterous to give any reasons for our considering Sartre an existentialist. Nevertheless, for the purpose of our study, we must recall some of the central ideas in Sartrian existentialism. The first of these is the notion that in man, and in man alone, existence precedes essence. "This means, more simply, that man first is, and that afterwards he is this, or that."<sup>7</sup>

Another idea central to Sartre's thought concerns freedom in man, insomuch as he sees him free to choose his own actions. Even though man may not be able to accomplish the action of his choice because of the interference of obstacles beyond his control, he is still free to evaluate these actions. He is like a god, free to choose his own good and his own evil; and he must





bear the responsibility for his own acts. This is the main idea which permeates Les Mouches.

Finally, we should mention Sartre's way of envisaging the problem of God. Perhaps one would be entitled to say that Sartre's notoriety (as different from his real contribution to philosophy) is due to some extent to the manner in which he treats, or mistreats, God as a subject of philosophical speculation. L'Être et le néant is the work of an atheist, and we find in this book the justification for Sartre's position. To quote Foulquié:

The main argument invoked on various occasions in L'Être et le néant is the contradiction implicit in the notion of a being who would be his own basis, or causa sui.

This argument, which Sartre does not develop, is generally explained in this way: in order to establish his own existence, he would have had to exist before existing, which is obviously self-contradictory.<sup>8</sup>

Having established, very briefly, the main points of the ideologies of Unamuno and Sartre which we consider most pertinent to the aim of our study, we shall proceed to outline the contents of the following chapters.

We shall analyze, in Chapter I, Sartre's Les Mouches in an attempt to underline the most striking thematic units found in it, namely, the theme of man's alienation from himself and from others; the theme of freedom inherent in all men and its effects in man's choice of his acts; the relationship which



man bears to God and nature as a result of his gratuitous freedom; the subjectivity of values resulting from man's freedom of choice; and the subsequent anguish resulting from his having to choose his own good and evil. Finally, we shall explore the theme of man's loss of innocence as he becomes aware of his freedom.

In Chapter II, an attempt will be made to demonstrate that the themes analyzed in Chapter I are also found in Unamuno's La esfinge, although some of them are treated in a manner different from Sartre's. Our purpose is to underline the thematic similarities between these two plays as well as to show possible differences that may arise in the manner in which each author deals with similar problems.

We should stress the fact that it is not our purpose to establish any direct influence whatsoever from Unamuno on Sartre, although we are aware of definite influences which Nietzsche and Kierkegaard exerted on both writers.

In Chapter III we shall deal with criticism on Les Mouches and La esfinge. Next, we shall apply Unamuno's and Sartre's views on the theatre to their respective plays. Ultimately, an analysis of these two plays shall be made, applying the theories on tragedy expounded by Aristotle, Hegel, and Nietzsche.





Notes to the Introduction

1

Cf. Arturo Serrano-Plaja, "Nausea y niebla", Revista de Occidente, 78 (1969), pp.295-328; and Fred Abrams, "Sartre, Unamuno and the 'Hole Theory,'" Romance Notes, V (1963-1964), pp.6-11.

2

Paul Foulquié, Existentialism, trans. Kathleen Raine (New York, 1950), p.96.

3

Paul Ilie, Unamuno: an Existential View of Self and Society (Madison, 1967), p.4.

4

Miguel de Unamuno, Del sentimiento trágico de la vida (New York, s.a.), p.144.

5

Unamuno, pp.150-151.

6

Ilie, p.5.

7

Foulquié, p.62.

8

Ibid., p.93.



CHAPTER I

A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF LES MOUCHES





In the first act of Sartre's play, Oreste, who at the beginning appears under the name of Philèbe, visits Argos, his native city. The first characteristic of his personality that Sartre underlines is his alienation; that is, his lack of connection with anyone in the city, and with the city itself. His alienation is physical, psychological and moral.

Oreste.- Je suis né ici et je dois demander  
mon chemin comme un passant.<sup>1</sup>

Philèbe is very much aware of his alienation. When Jupiter asks him if the gods should have struck Egisthe down for the murder of Agamemnon, Philèbe answers:

Oreste.- ... Ah! je ne sais pas ce qu'il fallait, et je m'en moque; je ne suis pas d'ici.<sup>2</sup>

As the conversation between Jupiter and Philèbe continues, we learn more about Philèbe's alienation. Jupiter tells Philèbe that the whole town of Argos is in perpetual repentance for the murder of Agamemnon. This collective repentance is what binds together the people of Argos. Then Jupiter tells Philèbe what he would say to Oreste should the latter appear in the town:

Jupiter.- ... Vous ne sauriez partager leur repentir, car vous n'avez pas eu de part à leur crime, et votre impertinente innocence vous sépare d'eux...<sup>3</sup>



Philèbe is and will be an outsider to the people of Argos as long as he does not have a common tie with them.

After Philèbe hears Jupiter's account of what he would tell Oreste, were he to appear in the city, he tries to tell Jupiter what he would reply to his remark were he Oreste:

Oreste.- Vraiment? C'est là ce que vous diriez? Eh bien, si j'étais, moi, ce jeune homme, je vous répondrais... Bah! Je ne sais pas ce que je vous répondrais. Peut-être avez-vous raison, <sup>et</sup> puis cela ne me regarde pas.<sup>4</sup>

Philèbe cannot answer Jupiter because he is still a stranger to the people and events of Argos. He is a man without commitment. He is a free man only in the sense that he has not performed an act by which his freedom would be engaged. He has not "become" his freedom either according to Sartre's definition of being: "Je suis mon acte..."<sup>5</sup> or according to what Oreste himself will later declare: "... ma liberté, c'est lui [mon acte]".<sup>6</sup> Therefore, we can conclude from the above that a man is nothing else but his own acts, that these acts constitute his basic freedom, and that Philèbe is not yet a free man.

To use Benoit Pruche's terms, Philèbe's freedom is more like a "liberté d'attente" or a "liberté d'absence" as opposed to a "liberté d'engagement". This "liberté d'attente" is exemplified in the following passage:



Le Pedagogue.- ... A présent vous voilà ...  
 affranchi de toutes les servi-  
 tudes et de toutes les croyan-  
 ces, sans famille, sans patrie,  
 sans religion, sans métier,  
 libre pour tous les engagements  
 et sachant qu'il ne faut jamais  
 s'engager, un homme supérieur  
 enfin ...<sup>7</sup>

This passage introduces the theme of freedom which will play a dominant role throughout the play. We have said that Philèbe's freedom is a "liberté d'attente" as opposed to a "liberté d'engagement" -- that of Oreste when he accomplishes his act. According to Sartre, "liberté d'attente" is the basic characteristic of being: "... elle [la liberté] est tres exactement l'étoffe de mon être".<sup>8</sup> Or as Pruche explains it:

La liberté, telle que la conçoit Sartre, c'est l'être même de l'homme. A ce stade, elle ne peut être que conscience, c'est-à-dire le pur néant du "pour-soi", liberté à l'état-pur, insaisissable absence. Mais elle s'apprend par des actes ... "l'homme de Sartre" est une conscience vide, une liberté-d'absence qui s'apprend successivement par ses actes.<sup>9</sup>

In Les Mouches, this being in question, this freedom at its purest state, is Philèbe, for he is in the process of "making himself" through his act. At this moment his freedom to choose is waiting for an act in which to engage itself.

We can make this dichotomy of "liberté d'attente" and "liberté d'engagement" in so far as we are able to stop time in the life of Philèbe in order to examine it. But Philèbe's



life is in the process of "becoming", his life is in constant movement in time. Pruche asserts: "... Il n'y a qu'une liberté... On peut donc faire plusieurs fois l'apprentissage de sa liberté et par conséquent l'apprentissage de soi-même".<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, "il n'y a donc qu'un Oreste, un Oreste qui apprend sa liberté".<sup>11</sup> But as a man choosing his acts, there is an

indefinite number of Orestes, each one choosing an act which will engage his freedom at a particular time, and each one having to choose again and again as new situations arise.

Nonetheless all these Orestes should have one binding element: memory. And this is precisely what Philèbe lacks. Indeed,

Oreste has no memories of his childhood, since he lived it as Philèbe of Athens and not as Oreste of Argos. This vacuum in Oreste's childhood, which did not constitute a problem for

Philèbe until his mentor told him of his true birth,<sup>12</sup> is what

Philèbe is trying to fill in order to assume the responsibility of Oreste's act. In the meantime, Philèbe has no purpose, has no "raison d'être" to justify his existence. This becomes

evident in Act I, when Philèbe is torn between assuming Oreste's role or continuing to be Philèbe:

Le Pédagogue.- ... Me direz-vous enfin ce que vous meditez? Pourquoi m'avoir entraîné ici? Et qu'y voulez-vous faire?

Oreste.- T'ai-je dit que j'avais quelque chose à y faire?...<sup>13</sup>





Then Philèbe comments on his lack of memories as Oreste:

Oreste.- ... Voilà mon palais. C'est là que mon père est né. C'est là qu'une putain et son maquereau l'on assassiné. J'y suis né aussi, moi. J'avais près de trois ans quand les soudards d'Egisthe m'emportèrent. Nous sommes sûrement passés par cette porte; l'un d'eux me tenait dans ses bras, j'avais les yeux grands ouverts et je pleurais sans doute... Ah! pas le moindre souvenir. Je vois une grande bâtisse muette, guindée dans sa solennité provinciale. Je la vois pour la première fois.

.....

Ah! un chien, un vieux chien qui se chauffe, couché près du foyer, et qui se soulève un peu, à l'entrée de son maître, en gémissant doucement pour le saluer, un chien a plus de mémoire que moi: c'est son maître qu'il reconnaît. Son maître. Et qu'est-ce qui est à moi?<sup>14</sup>

Now, Philèbe describes the effect his tutor's lesson on skepticism had on his life:

Oreste.- ... tu m'as laissé la liberté de ces fils que le vent arrache aux toiles d'araignée et qui flottent à dix pieds du sol; je ne pèse pas plus qu'un fil et je vis en l'air.<sup>15</sup>

Yet Philèbe, unhappy with his freedom, with his "liberté d'attente" because it lacks solid memories, is still torn as to what path to follow: Philèbe's or Oreste's:



Oreste.- ... ce n'est pas mon palais, ni ma porte. Et nous n'avons rien à faire ici.

Le Pédagogue.- Vous voilà raisonnable.  
Qu'auriez-vous gagné à y vivre? Votre âme, à l'heure qu'il est, serait terrorisée par un abject repentir.

Oreste.- Au moins serait-il à moi.<sup>16</sup>

However, when the tutor expresses his fear that Philèbe is scheming to oust Egisthe, Philèbe replies:

Oreste.- Chasser Egisthe? Tu peux te rassurer, bonhomme, il est trop tard ... qu'ai-je à faire avec ces gens? ... je ne partage pas leur remords et je ne connais pas un seul de leurs noms ... Un roi doit avoir les mêmes souvenirs que ses sujets.<sup>17</sup>

But his urge to fill his lack of Oreste's memories prompts him to add:

Oreste.- ... Ah! s'il était un acte, vois-tu, un acte qui me donnât droit de cité parmi eux; si je pouvais m'emparer, fût-ce par un crime, de leurs mémoires, de leur terreur et de leurs espérances pour combler le vide de mon coeur, dussé-je tuer ma propre mère...<sup>18</sup>

This act which would give Philèbe the right of "belonging" to the city and the people of Argos is Oreste's act. But, in order to choose it Philèbe must "become" Oreste. So, he is faced with the choice of one of these two paths: Philèbe's path, tainted with skepticism and the void of Oreste's childhood



memories, or Oreste's path, waiting for Philèbe to accomplish an act which will fill with heavy memories the void in his mind. It is Electre who helps Philèbe make up his mind to assume Oreste's role, the role of the Oreste of her dreams. A moment before he meets her, he is ready to leave Argos, but after Electre tells him how mistreated she is by everyone in the city, including her own mother, Philèbe feels pity for her and vacillates once more:

Electre.- ... Vas-tu rester longtemps?

Oreste.- Je devais partir aujourd'hui même.  
Et puis à présent...

Electre.- A présent?

Oreste.- Je ne sais plus.<sup>19</sup>

By the end of Act I, Philèbe has resolved to stay in Argos; that is, to assume Oreste's role:

Oreste.- Je ne pars plus.<sup>20</sup>

Then, he becomes gradually involved with the people of Argos and their problems. This involvement will reach its climax when Philèbe assumes completely Oreste's role by murdering Egisthe and Clytemnestre.

As the town's people are gathering at the footsteps of a huge cave (Act II) waiting to celebrate the day of the Dead, their superstition strikes Philèbe in such a way that he feels





compassion for them:

Oreste.- Quelles folies! Il faut dire à  
ces gens...<sup>21</sup>

But again, Philèbe's irresoluteness shows after Egisthe has condemned Electre to banishment and she refuses to leave the city. Philèbe fears for her safety and bids her to run away with him. Electre still refuses to run away, and tells Philèbe about the Oreste of her dreams:

Electre.- Ce n'est pas à toi de m'aider.  
Quelqu'un d'autre viendra pour me  
délivrer. Mon frère n'est pas mort,  
je le sais. Et je l'attends.<sup>22</sup>

Finally Philèbe reveals his true identity to Electre, but the Oreste of Electre's dreams is very different from the real Oreste. The real Oreste still remains a stranger to her:

Electre.- Non, tu n'est pas mon frère et je ne  
te connais pas... toi qui viens ré-  
clamer le nom d'Atride, qui es-tu  
pour te dire des nôtres? As-tu passé  
ta vie à l'ombre d'un meurtre?<sup>23</sup>

Again, as seen in the above passage, Philèbe's alienation from anything concerned with the city of Argos is the result of his lack of Oreste's childhood memories. He cannot call himself an Atride since he did not grow up with the memories of the murder of Agamemnon as Electre did. But now, Philèbe becomes aware that his alienation is due not only to his lack



of Oreste's childhood, but it is an alienation that has its roots deep in his own being. He feels as a "stranger" not only to others but to himself as well:

Oreste.- ... J'existe à peine: de tous les  
fantômes qui rôdent aujourd'hui  
par la ville, aucun n'est plus  
fantôme que moi... j'ignore les  
denses passions des vivants.

.....

Je vais de ville en ville, étranger<sup>24</sup>  
aux autres et à moi-même ...

This passage clarifies Philèbe's sense of alienation. It is due to the fact that he has not yet engaged his freedom; he has been living an empty life, or as he says himself: "... j'ignore les denses passions des vivants". In other words, his life has been more like a living death wandering from place to place, from people to people without having ever been attached to anyone or anything.

But apparently the moment to engage his freedom has finally arrived. Philèbe feels that he must choose a path which will inevitably lead him to an act which will fill the void of his being with solid memories. He tries to explain to Electre that the moment for him to choose has finally arrived, and why he must do so now:

Oreste.- ... Je veux mes souvenirs, mon sol,  
ma place au milieu des hommes d'Argos.

.....



C'est ma seule chance. Electre, tu ne peux pas me la refuser. Comprends moi: je veux être un homme de quelque part, un homme parmi les hommes.<sup>25</sup>

Philèbe's last moment of weakness comes when he asks Jupiter for an external indication as to what path to follow. When a negative sign is given to Philèbe's intention to stay in Argos and engage his freedom, a decisive change takes place in him. He interprets the sign:

Oreste.- Alors... c'est ça le Bien? Filer doux. Tout doux. Dire toujours "Pardon" et "Merci"... c'est ça? Le Bien. Leur Bien...<sup>26</sup>

Electre urges Philèbe to follow Jupiter's advice; but she then notices the change that has come upon him:

Electre.- Va vite, va vite. Ne déçois pas cette sage nourrice qui se penche sur toi du haut de l'Olympe. Qu'as-tu?

Oreste.- Il y a un autre chemin.

Electre.- Ne fais pas le méchant, Philèbe. Tu as demandé les ordres des Dieux: eh bien! tu les connais.

Oreste.- Des ordres?... Ah oui... Tu veux dire: la lumière là, autour de ce gros caillou? Elle n'est pas pour moi, cette lumière; et personne ne peut plus me donner d'ordre à présent.<sup>27</sup>

These passages above indicate that Philèbe is becoming aware of the power of his freedom. In asking Jupiter for an



indication as to what path to follow, Philèbe says: "je ne distingue plus le Bien du Mal et j'ai besoin qu'on me trace ma route".<sup>28</sup> That is to say, his value system is crumbling because of his awareness of his freedom. Values are subjective and prone to change in man because he is free to choose these values or to reject them. When Philèbe later on states that: "... le Bien ... [est] ... leur Bien",<sup>29</sup> he is just becoming aware of the subjective quality of values, and consequently, of the futility for a free man, or better, for a man aware of his freedom, to follow these values as if they were absolute. This is why Philèbe decides that from that moment on he will take orders neither from men nor from God.

The process of Philèbe becoming Oreste is approaching its climax. As he is becoming more and more aware of his freedom he is discarding Philèbe's empty life in order to become engaged in Oreste's. Philèbe comments on this change:

Oreste.- Comme tu es loin de moi, tout à coup..., comme tout est changé!  
Il y avait autour de moi quelque chose de vivant et de chaud.  
Quelque chose qui vient de mourir. Comme tout est vide... Ah!  
quel vide immense, à perte de vue  
... Mais qu'est-ce donc...,  
qu'est-ce donc qui vient de mourir?

Electre.- Philèbe...<sup>30</sup>

Indeed, it is possible to say that Philèbe has just "died": that young man who led an empty life, with no well defined





purpose, whose will could be compared to threads of spider webs floating in the air at the mercy of the wind. But, a new man is taking shape within Philèbe's corpse. This is a man aware of the power of his freedom, with a very definite purpose in mind: to engage his freedom at all cost. This new man tells Electre about his plans:

Oreste.- Je te dis qu'il y a un autre chemin..., mon chemin. Tu ne le vois pas? il part d'ici et il descend vers la ville. Il faut descendre, comprends-tu, descendre jusqu'à vous, vous êtes au fond d'un trou, tout au fond... Tu es ma soeur, Electre, et cette ville est ma ville...

Electre.- Laisse-moi! Tu me fais mal, tu me fais peur -- et je ne t'appartiens pas.

Oreste.- Je sais. Pas encore: je suis trop léger. Il faut que je me leste d'un forfait bien lourd qui me fasse couler à pic, jusqu'au fond d'Argos.<sup>31</sup>

Once the mechanism of the metamorphosis has been triggered, it is only a matter of time before Oreste assume all the responsibility of the act which will engage his freedom.

The next step that Oreste takes is to give some reasons for the act that he intends to commit. He tells Electre:

Oreste.- ... tous ces gens qui tremblent dans les chambres sombres, entourés de leurs chers défunts, suppose que j'assume tous leurs crimes. Suppose que je veuille mériter le nom de "voleur de remords" et que j'installe en moi tous leurs repentirs ... Dis, ce jour-là, quand je serai hanté par des remords plus nombreux que



les mouches d'Argos, par tous les remords de la ville, est-ce que je n'aurai pas acquis droit de cité parmi vous?

Electre.- Tu veux expier pour nous?

Oreste.- Expier? J'ai dit que j'installerai en moi vos repentirs, mais je n'ai pas dit ce que je ferai de ces volailles criardes ...<sup>32</sup>

Thus, he will free the people of Argos from their sense of guilt the moment he accomplishes his act. When Electre asks Oreste how he is going to assume the guilt of the people of Argos, Oreste's answer is very explicit:

Oreste.- Vous ne demandez qu'à vous en défaire. Le roi et la reine seuls les maintiennent de force en vos coeurs.<sup>33</sup>

The metamorphosis is at this point completed, at least in intention. Oreste has decided to murder Egisthe and Clytemnestre. Again, he is very careful to stress the motivation for his crime:

Oreste.- Les Dieux me sont témoins que je ne voulais pas verser leur sang.<sup>34</sup>

Oreste's motivation for his crime is not "personal": he does not intend to avenge the murder of his father Agamemnon, but rather to free the people of Argos, and act at the same time in a way which will engage his freedom (until now "liberté d'attente"). Paradoxically, this act makes him free: he tells Electre after having killed both Egisthe and Clytemnestre:



"Je suis libre, Electre".<sup>35</sup>

Finally, Oreste puts his plan into effect: he kills Egisthe first and then Clytemnestre. It is important to notice that he does not feel remorse for his crime, since he believes that he is doing the right thing; since he has chosen to be true to his own conscience rather than let outside interference (Jupiter and Egisthe, i.e., religion and state respectively) influence the decisions that will alter his life.

During his act, Oreste has coincided for a few moments with the Oreste of Electre's dreams. But the process of man becoming that which he is not yet keeps its course. After Oreste has killed Egisthe, Electre notices that he is not the same Oreste of a few minutes before:

Electre.- Oreste... je ne te reconnais pas  
non plus.<sup>36</sup>

After Oreste murders Clytemnestre, the theme of freedom and the theme of man becoming other than what he is appear together:

Oreste.- ... Nous sommes libres, Electre.  
Il me semble que je t'ai fait naître  
et que je viens de naître avec toi;  
je t'aime...<sup>37</sup>

In other words, Oreste has finally engaged his freedom through his act and at the same time he is becoming "another" Oreste, for his act is now in the past. The new Oreste tells



Electre what he will do with his act:

Oreste.- ... Je le porterai sur mes épaules ...  
et plus il sera lourd à porter, plus  
je me réjouirai, car ma liberté, c'est  
lui.<sup>38</sup>

Oreste is also aware that he has finally found his path:

Oreste.- ... Aujourd'hui il n'y en a plus  
qu'un, et Dieu sait où il mène:  
mais c'est mon chemin.<sup>39</sup>

Oreste's metamorphosis continues its course: now, he  
becomes someone else that he is not yet:

Oreste.- ... Tu me donneras la main et nous  
irons...

Electre.- Où?

Oreste.- Je ne sais pas; vers nous-mêmes.  
De l'autre côté des fleuves et des  
montagnes il y a un Oreste et une  
Electre qui nous attendent. Il  
faudra les chercher patiemment.<sup>40</sup>

The above passage exemplifies the idea of man trying to coincide  
with himself; that is, the conscience (pour-soi) tries to be  
the object of itself (en-soi) or to be at one with itself. This,  
of course, is never attained as Sartre puts it:

...on se rappelle l'âne qui tire derrière lui  
une carriole et qui tente d'attraper une ca-  
rotte qu'on a fixé au bout d'un bâton assujet-  
ti lui même aux brancards. Tout effort de  
l'âne pour happer la carotte a pour effect de  
faire avancer l'attelage tout entier et la





carotte elle-même qui demeure toujours à la même distance de l'âne. Ainsi courons-nous après un possible que notre course même fait apparaître, qui n'est rien que notre course et qui se définit par là même comme hors d'atteinte. Nous courons vers nous-même et nous sommes, de ce fait, l'être qui ne peut pas se rejoindre.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, Oreste is like the ass of the example. He tries to coincide with himself (i.e., to take the carrot), when, actually, what he does is to become "another" Oreste (i.e., to move the cart forward).

Up to this point the theme of man becoming what he is not has been central in the discussion of Les Mouches. The steps in this process can be summarized as follows: solitude: as a result of alienation from oneself and from others; emptiness: lack of a significant biography, an increasing awareness of the need to act decisively, rejection of accepted values and of conventional morality; the act of commitment; the death of the "other" self; the new man and the new freedom: man in the process of making himself.

Let us see now the relationship of man with nature and God as it appears in the play. We find Jupiter (God), a character in the play, engaged in conversation with Oreste, with Egisthe and with Electre. We can see that He is in close communion with nature, which He totally controls: He is responsible for the flies, for hurtling the enormous rock from the cavern of the Dead against the columns of the temple in Act II, and He



makes light flash from the rock as a sign intended to make Oreste leave the city. At the same time, Jupiter is depicted as a fetish, as a figment of man's imagination, in accordance with Sartre's atheistic views. We can take Jupiter's words on His own nature as a valid clue to His identity when He speaks to Egisthe in Act II:

Egisthe.- Qui es-tu? Que viens-tu faire ici?

Jupiter.- Tu ne me reconnais pas?

.....

Tu m'as vu pourtant. C'était en  
songe.<sup>42</sup>

Jupiter continues:

Jupiter.- ... Depuis cent mille ans je danse  
devant les hommes. Une lente et  
sombre danse.

.....

Tant qu'il y aura des hommes sur  
cette terre, je serai condamné à  
danser devant eux.<sup>43</sup>

Jupiter is depicted as a psychological force residing in man's mind, a force which will cease as soon as man stops being. But, this is only one facet of Jupiter's identity. He is also closely related to nature; in fact He is the force imposing order on nature. Jupiter talks to Oreste:



Jupiter.- Oreste! Je t'ai créé et j'ai créé  
 toute chose: ... Vois ces planètes  
 qui roulent en ordre, sans jamais  
 se heurter: c'est moi qui en ai  
 réglé le cours, selon la justice  
 Entends l'harmonie des sphères,  
 cet énorme chant de grâces minéral ...  
 Par moi les espèces se perpétuent ...  
 ton corps même te trahit, car il se  
 conforme à mes prescriptions.<sup>44</sup>

In other words, Jupiter is the order of the Universe, He has absolute control over nature. This order is exemplified by music (the Music of the Spheres) with its notes, following each other in a solid, rhythmic sequence. But a flaw in this order arises when man encounters nature and discovers that he is free. This order cannot be imposed upon him because of the intrinsic nature of his being: freedom. That is, his freedom is a freedom to choose and therefore, in order for him to be encompassed in the order of nature, he would have to be choosing it constantly. So, man is not on the same level with the rest of nature because he has the freedom to choose or reject its order; and this fact is what distinguishes him and alienates him from the rest of nature.

Man's inherent freedom alienates him from nature; he is not part of the order of the universe. His freedom allows him the possibility of making choices, which choices imply value judgments. Thus, man's freedom introduces a question of values: are God, Nature and Order good? And subsequently, is man evil?



The answer to the first question is "yes" and, paradoxically, the answer to the second is "no". In support of the answer to the first question let us look at the text:

Jupiter.- ... Tu n'es pas chez toi, intrus; tu es dans le monde comme l'écharde dans la chair ... car le monde est bon; je l'ai créé selon ma volonté et je suis le Bien. Mais toi, tu as fait le mal ... Le Bien est partout ... tu le retrouveras jusque dans la nature du feu et de la lumière ... Le Bien est en toi, hors de toi ... c'est lui qui permit le succès de ta mauvaise entreprise, car il fut la clarté des chandelles, la dureté de ton épée, la fore de ton bras. Et ce Mal dont tu es si fier, dont tu te nommes l'auteur, qu'est-il sinon un reflet de l'être, un faux-fuyant, une image trompeuse dont l'existence même est soutenue par le Bien.<sup>45</sup>

This is Jupiter's idea of the Good, based on Order. In this sense, Evil can only exist in contrast, or superimposed on a background of Goodness. Or as Jupiter puts it:

Jupiter.- ... un faux-fuyant, une image trompeuse dont l'existence même est soutenue par le Bien.<sup>46</sup>

Jupiter continues by passing judgement on Oreste:

Jupiter.- ... Rentre en toi-même, Oreste: l'univers te donne tort, et tu es un ciron dans l'univers. Rentre dans la nature, fils dénaturé: connais ta faute, abhorre-la, arrache-la de toi ...





Oreste.- ... tout ton univers ne suffira pas  
à me donner tort. Tu es le roi des  
Dieux, Jupiter, le roi des pierres,  
et des étoiles, le roi des vagues de  
la mer. Mais tu n'es pas le roi des  
hommes.

Jupiter.- Je ne suis pas ton roi, larve im-  
prudente. Qui donc t'a créé?

Oreste.- Toi. Mais il ne fallait pas me  
créer libre.

Jupiter.- Je t'ai donné ta liberté pour me  
servir.

Oreste.- Il se peut, mais elle s'est retour-  
née contre toi et nous n'y pouvons  
rien, ni l'un ni l'autre.<sup>47</sup>

This is why we have to answer "no" to the question: is man  
evil? In the context of the play, man is not evil, he is free,  
free to choose his acts. And although we may consider this free-  
dom evil in itself because it opposes the order of nature, we  
cannot consider man evil because of his freedom since he did not  
choose to be born free. Freedom was given to him, as Sartre  
would say, "de trop", gratuitously, without man having chosen  
it. That is why Oreste tells Jupiter:

Oreste.- ... Il ne fallait pas me créer libre.

.....

A peine m'as-tu créé que j'ai cessé de  
t'appartenir.<sup>48</sup>

The result of the conflict between man and nature is a  
feeling of anguish. He does not fit in nature's order once he



has found out that he is free. So Oreste tells Jupiter:

Oreste.- ... Moi, je ne te hais pas. Qu'y a-t-il de toi à moi? Nous glisserons l'un contre l'autre sans nous toucher, comme deux navires. Tu es un Dieu et je suis libre: nous sommes pareillement seuls et notre angoisse est pareille.<sup>49</sup>

We should notice the distinction made in the play between man being free and man knowing that he is free. The men of Argos are free but do not realize it; rather, they give up their freedom to act, and allow Egisthe to choose for them. In Oreste's case, he learns that he is free at the cost of the loss of his innocence and his youth. So, man learning his freedom is closely linked to his loss of innocence, the theme of maturity.

We have seen the theme of freedom developed through the process of Philèbe becoming Oreste, in other words, man becoming what he is not yet. But this process encompasses also the theme of maturity, of Oreste losing his innocence together with his youth. At this point, it would be helpful to notice the meaning of the name Philèbe in Greek: Philèbe means "lover of youth".<sup>50</sup> And that is what Oreste was when he lived as Philèbe, he was in love with his own youth before he chose the act that made him Oreste. He was innocent insofar as his youth veiled from him the knowledge that he was free. Consciousness of his freedom amounts to his loss of innocence.



The theme of maturity can be explored by contrasting two passages in the play. The first one deals with Oreste (Philèbe) before committing his act. Electre tells him:

Electre.- Que tu as l'air jeune. Est-ce que tu t'es jamais battu? Cette épée que tu portes au côté, t'a-t-elle jamais servi?

Oreste.- Jamais.

Electre.- ... Je te regarde et je vois que nous sommes deux orphelins.<sup>51</sup>

Oreste is presented as a young man characterized by his inexperience in life. If this passage is contrasted with the one after Oreste had decided to take no one's orders, the change that comes over him becomes evident:

Electre.- Que vas-tu entreprendre?

Oreste.- Attends. Laisse-moi dire adieu à cette légèreté sans tache qui fut la mienne. Laisse-moi dire adieu à ma jeunesse...

Electre.- Comme tu as changé: tes yeux ne brillent plus, ils sont ternes et sombres. Hélas! Tu étais si doux, Philèbe. Et voilà que tu me parles comme l'autre me parlait en songe.<sup>52</sup>

.....

Electre.- ... Hélas! jamais je ne reverrai cette douceur, jamais plus je ne reverrai Philèbe.<sup>53</sup>

It is therefore evident that the change that has come over Oreste is the result of his loss of youth (i.e., his



innocence). Youth is linked to the idea of innocence for the first time when Jupiter tells Philèbe what he would tell Oreste if the latter would appear in Argos:

Jupiter.- ... Je dirais donc: "Jeune homme, allez-vous-en! Que cherchez-vous ici? ... Vous ne sauriez partager leur repentir, car vous n'avez pas eu de part à leur crime, et votre impertinente innocence vous sépare d'eux ...<sup>54</sup>

As Electre pleads with him to leave the city, she says:

Electre.- Philèbe, va-t'en, je t'en supplie: j'ai pitié de toi, va-t'en si je te suis chère; rien ne peut t'arriver que du mal, et ton innocence ferait échouer mes entreprises.<sup>55</sup>

Oreste's youth has been characterized by his innocence, and he loses it by the knowledge of his freedom. The first indication of Oreste's becoming aware of his freedom is found at the moment in which he feels lost, and asks Jupiter for a sign to show him which path to follow:

Oreste.- Si du moins j'y voyais clair! Ah! Zeus, Zeus, roi du ciel, je me suis rarement tourné vers toi, et tu ne m'as guère été favorable, mais tu m'es témoin que je n'ai jamais voulu que le Bien. A présent je suis las, je ne distingue plus le Bien du Mal et j'ai besoin qu'on me trace ma route.

The fact that he can no longer distinguish Right from Wrong





indicates that his concept of values has been shaken. Since values are not absolutes -- as we have seen before -- but man-made, they are, therefore, of a subjective nature. And it is precisely the discovery of the subjective nature of values which moves Oreste one step forward in the awareness of his freedom and makes him say:

Oreste.- ... personne ne peut plus me donner  
d'ordre à présent.<sup>57</sup>

The loss of man's innocence and youth by the knowledge of his freedom in Sartre's play could be compared to the Biblical account of the loss of the Earthly Paradise by Adam and Eve. It is knowledge which makes Adam and Eve lose paradise. It is the knowledge of Good and Evil which makes them like gods; that is, free to choose their own good and evil. In Oreste's case it is knowledge which makes him lose his innocence: he is free and, thus like a god, with the power to choose his own good and his own evil. In Oreste's words:

Oreste.- ... Hier encore tu étais un voile  
sur mes yeux, un bouchon de cire  
dans mes oreilles; c'était hier  
que j'avais une excuse: tu étais  
mon excuse d'exister, car tu m'a-  
vais mis au monde pour servir tes  
desseins, et le monde était une  
vieille entremetteuse qui me par-  
lait de toi, sans cesse. Et puis  
tu m'as abandonné.

Jupiter.- T'abandonner, moi?



Oreste.- Hier ... toute ta nature se pressait  
autour de moi; elle chantait ton  
Bien ... Ma jeunesse, obéissant à  
tes ordres, s'était levée, elle se  
tenait devant mon regard, suppli-  
ante comme une fiancée qu'on va  
délaissier: je voyais ma jeunesse  
pour la dernière fois. Mais tout à  
coup, la liberté a fondu sur moi et  
m'a transi, la nature a sauté en  
arrière, et je n'ai plus eu d'âge,  
et je me suis senti tout seul, au  
milieu de ton petit monde bénin,  
comme quelqu'un qui a perdu son  
ombre; et il n'y a plus rien eu au  
ciel, ni Bien ni Mal, ni personne  
pour me donner des ordres.<sup>58</sup>

So, we see again that it is freedom which isolates man from  
the rest of nature. Freedom to make his own choices as to  
good or evil. The consequence for man of the knowledge of  
his freedom is, as in the case of Adam and Eve, alienation  
and exile, as Jupiter says:

Jupiter.- ... Ta liberté n'est qu'une gale  
qui te démange, elle n'est qu'un  
exil.

Oreste.- Tu dis vrai: un exil.<sup>59</sup>

Yet, by rejecting freedom, as the people of Argos do,  
man can avoid the exile implicit in that freedom. Jupiter  
tries to bring Oreste back to nature:

Jupiter.- Le mal n'est pas si profond: il date  
d'hier. Reviens parmi nous. Reviens:  
vois comme tu es seul ... Tu es pâle,  
et l'angoisse dilate tes yeux. ... Te  
voilà rongé par un mal inhumain,



étranger à ma nature, étranger à  
 toi-même. Reviens: je suis  
 l'oubli, je suis le repos.<sup>60</sup>

The key word in the above passage is "anguish". It is the result of man's discovery of his freedom and consequent alienation from the rest of nature.

Jupiter calls Oreste's consciousness of his freedom a "disease". Unamuno, interestingly enough, refers to consciousness, naming it a disease in Del sentimiento trágico de la vida.<sup>61</sup> Of course, once this "disease" has taken roots in man's mind, there is no cure for it. Man must learn to live with it. This is precisely the attitude of Oreste in the play. Jupiter tries in vain to win Oreste back to nature, back to innocence:

Jupiter.- ... Reviens: je suis l'oubli, je  
 suis le repos.<sup>62</sup>

That is, Jupiter represents, again, the rigid order of nature, the world without conscience, the world without self-knowledge, and offers Oreste a last opportunity to return to it. But Oreste cannot go back, and he states his reasons:

Oreste.- Etranger à moi-même, je sais. Hors nature, contre nature, sans excuse, sans autre recours qu'en moi. Mais je ne reviendrai pas sous ta loi: je suis condamné à n'avoir d'autre loi que la mienne. Je ne reviendrai pas à ta nature: mille chemins y sont tracés qui conduisent vers toi, mais je ne peux suivre que mon chemin. Car je suis un homme, Jupiter, et



chaque homme doit inventer son chemin.<sup>63</sup>

In other words, Oreste accepts his responsibility of being a man with the knowledge of his freedom. He can no more go back to nature, to innocence, than he can reverse the movement of time and return to his youth. Moreover, he does not even will to go back, since by willing a return to the past, he would be calling for a petrification of it, since it does not exist any longer as a possibility. Even Electre is aware of the irrevocability of the past as she asks Oreste:

Electre.- ... Peux-tu faire que tout ceci  
n'ai pas été? ... Peux-tu empêcher  
que nous soyons pour toujours les  
assassins de notre mère?

Oreste.- Crois-tu que je voudrais l'empêcher?<sup>64</sup>

So, at the end of the play, we find Oreste accepting his lot to be a man with the knowledge of his freedom. He is aware that this knowledge has "aged" him as he says:

Oreste.- ... Les mots que je dis sont trop  
gros pour ma bouche, ils la déchir-  
rent; le destin que je porte est  
trop lourd pour ma jeunesse, il l'a  
brisée.<sup>65</sup>

He is also aware of the solitude which awaits him:

Oreste.- Je suis tout seul.

.....





Jusqu'à la mort je serai seul.  
Après...<sup>66</sup>

Nonetheless he feels a certain attachment to the men of Argos, for he says:

Oreste.- Les hommes d'Argos sont mes hommes.  
Il faut que je leur ouvre les yeux.<sup>67</sup>

And he feels that he should at least share his knowledge of freedom with them:

Oreste.- Pourquoi leur refuserais-je le  
désespoir qui est en moi, puis-  
que c'est leur lot?

Jupiter.- Qu'en feront-ils?

Oreste.- Ce qu'ils voudront; ils sont  
libres, et la vie humaine com-  
mence de l'autre côté du dé-  
sespoir.<sup>68</sup>

But, in fact, Oreste does not share it with the men of Argos. He merely tells them about his crime and the total responsibility he has assumed for it:

Oreste.- ... vous avez compris que mon crime  
est bien à moi ... Vos fautes et vos  
remords, vos angoisses nocturnes,  
le crime d'Egisthe, tout est à moi,  
je prends tout sur moi ... Adieu,  
mes hommes, tentez de vivre: tout  
est neuf ici, tout est à commencer.<sup>69</sup>

And he tells them nothing about man's freedom to choose and the responsibility and anguish which it implies. In other



words, Oreste does not live up to his intention, expressed to Jupiter, of telling the people of Argos of freedom which he feels is man's lot.

In our analysis of Les Mouches, we have dealt with the theme of man becoming what he is not, man making himself. As man becomes aware of his inherent freedom to choose, he loses his innocence; and this loss leads to his estrangement from nature and God. As a result, he is left outside the order of nature insofar as he is free, and he cannot escape the feeling of anguish which his freedom and its correlate responsibility, bring upon him.



NOTES TO CHAPTER I

- 1  
Jean-Paul Sartre, "Les Mouches", in Théâtre, 34th ed. (Paris, 1947), p. 12.
- 2  
Ibid., p. 18.
- 3  
Ibid., p. 20.
- 4  
Ibid., p. 21.
- 5  
Jean-Paul Sartre, L'Etre et le néant, quoted in Benoit Pruche, L'Homme de Sartre (Vichy, 1949), p. 36.
- 6  
Sartre, Théâtre, p. 84.
- 7  
Ibid., pp. 23-24.
- 8  
Jean-Paul Sartre, L'Etre et le néant (Paris, 1943), p. 514.
- 9  
Benoit Pruche, L'Homme de Sartre (Vichy, 1949), p. 38.
- 10  
Ibid., p. 37.
- 11  
Ibid., p. 39.
- 12  
Sartre, Théâtre, p. 26.
- 13  
Ibid., p. 22.
- 14  
Ibid., pp. 22-23.
- 15  
Ibid., p. 24.



16

Ibid., p. 25.

17

Ibid., p. 26.

18

Ibid., p. 26.

19

Ibid., p. 31.

20

Ibid., p. 40.

21

Ibid., p. 44.

22

Ibid., p. 57.

23

Ibid., p. 59.

24

Ibid., pp. 60-61.

25

Ibid., p. 61.

26

Ibid., p. 63.

27

Ibid., p. 63.

28

Ibid., p. 62.

29

Ibid., p. 63.

30

Ibid., p. 63.

31

Ibid., pp. 63-64.

32

Ibid., p. 65.





33

Ibid., p. 65.

34

Ibid., p. 65.

35

Ibid., p. 83.

36

Ibid., p. 81.

37

Ibid., p. 83.

38

Ibid., p. 84.

39

Ibid., p. 84.

40

Ibid., p. 104.

41

Sartre, L'Être et le néant, p. 253.

42

Sartre, Théâtre, pp. 72-73.

43

Ibid., p. 78.

44

Ibid., pp. 98-99.

45

Ibid., pp. 98-99.

46

Ibid., p. 99.

47

Ibid., pp. 99-100.

48

Ibid., pp. 99-100.

49

Ibid., p. 102.



50

Robert Champigny, Stages on Sartre's Way (Bloomington, 1959), p. 86.

51

Sartre, Théâtre, pp. 58-59.

52

Ibid., pp. 64-65.

53

Ibid., p. 66.

54

Ibid., p. 20.

55

Ibid., p. 61.

56

Ibid., p. 62.

57

Ibid., p. 63.

58

Ibid., pp. 100-101.

59

Ibid., p. 101.

60

Ibid., p. 101.

61

On this subject Champigny says: "... Consciousness or conscience, may appear, in the words of Unamuno, as a disease. It prevents satisfaction, for it tears man away from the plenitude of being, from the innocence of nature, without providing him with another retreat. Man is a free being and yet his only abode is accidental and determined by nature." (Champigny, p. 88).

62

Sartre, Théâtre, p. 101.

63

Ibid., p. 101.

64

Ibid., p. 84.



65

Ibid., pp. 102-103.

66

Ibid., p. 105.

67

Ibid., p. 102.

68

Ibid., p. 102.

69

Ibid., p. 108.



CHAPTER II

A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF LA ESFINGE

AND COMPARISON WITH LES MOUCHES





Let us trace now in Unamuno's La esfinge the main themes found in Sartre's Les Mouches. We must insist that we are not trying to show a direct influence of Unamuno upon Sartre, but rather how two thinkers, two writers with somewhat similar preoccupations react when faced with man in his relationship with himself and others.

We find Angel, the protagonist of La esfinge, depicted in many ways like the Oreste of Les Mouches, for the first characteristic which appears in the play is his alienation:

Eusebio.- No descuides a tu marido; me parece que emociones como la de anoche le perjudican.

Eufemia.- Al contrario. ¡Vida, vida, mucha vida! La vida ahogará sus pueriles temores y extrañas tristezas.<sup>1</sup>

The fear and sadness which Angel feels is the basis of his alienation from his friends. He treats them with a certain scorn after delivering a political speech. On Angel's speech Pepe comments:

Pepe.- ¡Admirable! ¡Qué fuerza! ¡Qué pasión! ¡Vaya un modo de levantar en vilo al público! ...

Angel.- ¡Hombre..., hombre..., apea el tratamiento!<sup>2</sup>

Teodoro adds to Pepe's comment:



Teodoro.- Fue una obra de arte.

.....

Puede usted hacer, don Angel, una vida muy hermosa, un verdadero alto relieve...

Angel.- Para que usted la ponga en coplas, ¿no es eso?

Pepe adds: "

Pepe.- Esas tristezas y desalientos son propias de todos los escogidos.<sup>4</sup>

The climax of Angel's alienation from other human beings occurs at the end of Act II as Pepe finds him in a desperate state because Eufemia has left him:

Angel.- Tú eres bueno..., tú... Estoy solo..., solo...

Pepe.- ¡Solo no! ¡Conmigo!

Angel.- Contigo... ¿Y por qué, siendo tú tan bueno, te despreciaré tanto, Pepe?

Pepe.- (Separándose de él) ¿Tú? ¿Despreciarme? ¿A mí?

Angel.- (Confundido) ¡Sí..., yo... a ti!

.....

Solo..., sí, solo... Tú estás separado de mí para siempre después de la confesión que acabo de hacerte... ¿Lo ves? ¡Te callas! (Pepe sale). ¡Solo, no; contigo, Dios mío! Y



Dios, ¿dónde está? ¡Solo, por mi culpa! ¡Soberbio corazón! Querías la cima solitaria... ¡Ven, ven, y llena la soledad de mi alma!<sup>5</sup>

In this passage, Angel feels utterly alone, and his pride ("¡Solo, por mi culpa! ¡Soberbio corazón!") is to be blamed for his alienation from the rest of humanity. He is not only alienated from his fellow men, but also from God: "Y Dios, ¿dónde está?".

The idea of freedom plays a very important role in this play. We find Angel talking about freedom, political freedom in this case, of which he says:

Angel.- ... ¡Libertad! ¡Santa palabra! Pero libertad efectiva, real. Cuando la herida se cicatriza cae la costra que protegió en un tiempo; así ha de caer toda autoridad humana. Hay que disolver las formas muertas; hay que romper la costra en que se tiene encerrado al pueblo, y que irrumpa y derrame su contenido ... Es muy grande el instinto de las muchedumbres cuando no se le bastardea con imposiciones de fuera.<sup>6</sup>

As we saw in Les Mouches, the people of Argos were subjugated in an iniquitous fashion by Egisthe. Oreste puts an end to this oppression by assuming the sense of guilt which Egisthe had imposed on them. By so doing, he sacrifices himself for the people in order to restore their sense of human dignity.<sup>7</sup> Angel also wants to restore freedom to the people.



He agrees with his wife, Eufemia, that he should sacrifice himself for his people:

Eufemia.- La verdad es que ese pobre pueblo merece cualquier sacrificio...

.....

Angel.- Es verdad; hay que servirle. ¡Pobre pueblo!

.....

Sí, que podamos cerrar los ojos para siempre habiendo servido al porvenir, y que pise luego la humanidad libre el polvo a que habremos de reducirnos.<sup>8</sup>

Angel is haunted by the threat of nothingness which death implies. And since he feels that this is the people's final lot, he sympathizes with them and feels they deserve every possible sacrifice on his part:

Angel.- ... Día llegará en que a esta vieja tierra le tocará su turno y, hecha también polvo, se esparcirá por los espacios llevándose nuestra ciencia, nuestro arte, nuestra civilización toda reducida a aerolitos pelados. Y entonces cantarán las esferas celestiales el himno a nuestra libertad tan soñada. ¡Pobre pueblo! Tienes razón, Eufemia; merece cualquier sacrificio...<sup>9</sup>

Eufemia and Eusebio talk about Angel's political future:

Eufemia.- Parece providencial su situación, libre y desembarazado para poder entregarse en cuerpo y alma a su verdadera misión...





.....

Eusebio.- ¡Psé! Quieres llenar el vacío de su alma tupiendolo de gloria. Ese vacío no se llena así...<sup>10</sup>

Eufemia is right in saying that Angel is free to devote himself to his true mission, but she is wrong in assuming that the proper field for the exercise of Angel's freedom is politics. Eusebio, however, has noticed that Angel feels a certain emptiness within his being. Angel's emptiness is due to his preoccupation with death and the nothingness that, he fears, lies beyond it:

Angel.- ... Es ese monstruoso egoísmo lo que a todas horas me pone ante los ojos del espíritu el espectro de la muerte y<sup>11</sup> tras ella el inmenso vacío eterno.

Angel is very much aware of his emptiness and worries about it. It seems that because of it he is alienated from others, and is ready to hurt with ironic remarks everybody around him. Eufemia criticises his attitude:

Eufemia.- Tienes, Angel, una manera de compadecer que hiere...

Angel.- Es porque más que nadie necesito de compasión yo.

Eufemia.- Déjate de esas cosas ya ... ¡Piensa en la causa del pueblo!

.....

... Hasta esta soledad en que vivimos, y que acaso más de uno nos compadezca, nos deja libres, libres para obra más grande que la de fundar una familia...



.....

Sólo con una causa grande y noble llenarás el vacío que sientes.

. Angel.- ¡Crecerá más...!

.....

Es eso como el mar, que cuanto más de él se bebe, da más sed. No la apaga, y sí las aguas mansas y silenciosas del regato oculto entre las cañas.<sup>12</sup>

As we said before, Eufemia is right in assuming that Angel is free to engage himself in an act, but this act can only be "his" act. Nobody can choose this act for him. In Angel's case the political life which Eufemia and his friends persuaded him to follow is certainly not his act.

At this stage, Angel is very much like the Philèbe we saw in the previous chapter, for he is torn between two paths to follow, the one imposed on him by others (Angel's political life), the other his own path (his wish to retire from political life). In other words, Angel now finds himself with a freedom which is waiting, so to speak, for an act which will engage it. His freedom is now a "liberté d'attente" like that of Philèbe.

The first act chosen by Angel of his own free will is his resignation from political life in order to engage himself in the search for his interior life:

Angel.- ... Renunciaré de una vez para siempre a esa vida que se me convierte en muerte. Daré un adiós definitivo al



mundo, quemando mis naves. ¡La renuncia! ... Una renuncia irrevocable; un acto, un verdadero acto, como dicen ellos; algo que me incapacite para volver a la vida pública, donde se tolera todo menos la confesión de culpas...<sup>13</sup>

Angel refers to his political life as "esa vida que se me convierte en muerte". Since he did not choose his political life - as he tells Felipe:

Angel.- ... De mi matrimonio no hablemos; ha sido ella quien me lanzó a la vida pública, ella la que quiso emborracharme de gloria...<sup>14</sup>

- it has become a living death to him. He cannot be involved in it, since it has been forced on him.

During his years as Philèbe, Oreste has a similar attitude toward his existence, a passionless life which makes him say:

Oreste.- ... J'existe à peine: de tous les fantômes qui rôdent aujourd'hui par la ville, aucun n'est plus fantôme que moi ... j'ignore les denses passions des vivants.<sup>15</sup>

Oreste's first act is the renunciation of his meaningless life as Philèbe, much in the same way as Angel rejects his political past because it is a "living death" for him.

It is relevant to notice how Angel describes the first act chosen of his own free will:



Angel.- ... Una renuncia irrevocable; un  
acto, un verdadero acto ...<sup>16</sup>

He is as aware of the irrevocability of his act as Electre  
was of Oreste's and her act:

Electre.- ... Peux-tu faire que tout ceci  
n'ait pas été? ... Peux-tu  
empêcher que nous soyons pour  
toujours les assassins de notre  
mère?<sup>17</sup>

By renouncing politics, Angel gains his "liberté d'attente".

Angel.- [Política,]... he decidido renun-  
ciar a tal juego ... Desde hoy ha  
muerto para mí el mundo ese; quiero  
ser libre, ¡libertad! ¡Libertad!<sup>18</sup>

Angel's wish to be free prompts him to choose this act. He  
desires to be free to choose his own way of life, as he sees  
fit. Felipe tells Angel that one should not let others make  
one's own decisions:

Felipe.- Cobardía es no entregarse cada uno  
a su propio natural, desoyendo la  
voz de la conciencia...<sup>19</sup>

In other words, one must act according to one's own conscience  
and then face courageously the act chosen, and its consequences.  
A similar idea is found in Les Mouches, as Oreste tells Jupiter:  
"Le plus lâche des assassins c'est celui qui a des remords",<sup>20</sup>  
a statement which stresses the idea of remaining true to one's





own act and its consequences.

When Joaquín finds out about the letter of resignation that Angel is about to send, he tries to stop him. Angel, again, tells Joaquín of his desire to act as his own mind dictates:

Angel.- ¿Y quién eres tú para exigirme promesa alguna? ¿Soy yo o eres tú quien de mí ha de dar cuenta? Mucho de predicar tolerancia, sinceridad, libertad; pero cuando alguien quiere ser de veras sincero y libre, ¡contra él todos! Pasen las mayores extravagancias, las opiniones más absurdas, la conducta más depravada; pero emprender en serio el camino de su propia redención..., todos sois a motejarle e impedirselo. Creeríase que leéis en su conducta un reproche mudo. ¡Libertad! Es lo que quiero: libertad de ser como por dentro me siento.<sup>21</sup> ¡Libertad! ¡Verdadera libertad!

This passage further stresses the idea that man should act in accordance with the dictates of his mind without letting other men influence his decisions.

Joaquín tells Angel that his decision could be taken as an act of treason:

Joaquín.- ... si abandonas la causa te tendrán por traidor...

.....

Angel.- ¡No quiero serlo a mi conciencia!<sup>22</sup>

Angel's answer indicates his conviction that it is more



important to be true to oneself than to others; even if by so doing one is considered a traitor, Nicolás, another of Angel's colleagues, tells him:

Nicolás.- Llevarás una vida miserable...

Angel.- ¡No a mis ojos!<sup>23</sup>

Even at the end of his life, when the people come to lynch him because of his alleged treason, Angel values the idea of being true to one's own mind above anything else. This he tells the infuriated mob:

Angel.- ... Pedís libertad y venís a qui-  
tármela; no queréis que sea como  
soy... ¡Libertad!<sup>24</sup>

So far we have seen that Angel in his relationship with other human beings has adopted the attitude of being true to himself. In other words, when choosing his acts he will not take orders from other men. Angel's position in this respect reminds us of Oreste's statement: "... personne ne peut plus me donner d'ordre à présent".<sup>25</sup> Nobody, either men or gods, will give him orders. Angel's refusal to follow men's will is similar to that of Oreste; but his attitude toward God differs from that of Oreste, who rejects Jupiter's will. These different attitudes toward God constitute one of the main differences between the two plays. This variance can be accounted for by the authors philosophies: Unamuno's Christian and Sartre's atheist existentialism. Angel is very much aware



of the need to follow God's will, as he tells Felipe, his spiritual adviser:

Angel.- ... ¡Sí, libertad, libertad! ¡Santa  
libertad de ser como Dios me hizo<sup>26</sup>  
y no como me quiere el mundo ...

Angel talks about the path of one's own salvation as being the path that one wants to follow, chosen for himself. In order for Angel to follow this path he has to reject his political life and give himself to his interior life.

Both Oreste and Angel have asked for a supernatural sign to find out what path to follow. As we have seen in Chapter One, Oreste asks Jupiter whether to stay in Argos or to go away. After an indication to leave Argos is given (light flashes out round the stone)<sup>27</sup>, Oreste says:

Oreste.- Il y a un autre chemin.

.....

Des ordres?... Ah oui... la  
lumière là autour de ce gros  
caillou? Elle n'est pas pour  
moi, cette lumière; et personne  
ne peut plus me donner d'ordre  
à présent.<sup>28</sup>

This passage indicates that Oreste rejects both men's and god's advice as far as choosing his own acts is concerned.

Angel also desires a supernatural answer:



Angel.- ... Quise consultar mi porvenir,  
y una mañana, después de purifi-  
cada mi conciencia y puesto de  
rodillas, abrí al azar los Evan-  
gelios y puse el dedo sobre aquellas  
palabras que dicen: "Id y predicad el  
Evangelio a todas las naciones".  
Quedé pensativo y sin decidirme; em-  
pecé a rumiarlo, y acordé pedir acla-  
ración al Espíritu. Y otra mañana,  
con igual recogimiento y solemnidad,  
latiéndome el pecho, volví a abrir  
el texto para leer aquello que le  
ciego, curado, dijo a los fariseos:  
"Ya os lo dije y no me oísteis, ¿por  
qué queréis saberlo otra vez?"

.....

Esas palabras, como aquellas otras de  
"¡Conque a ser bueno, Angel!", no se  
me callan nunca..., nunca... Sobre  
todo, desde que me casé.<sup>29</sup>

In other words, Angel believed the supernatural answer he  
found in the Bible, but did not follow its advice. Now, after  
having resigned from politics he hopes to discover God's  
design for him. Although, at least in intention, he is willing  
to be as God made him ("... Santa libertad de ser como Dios me  
hizo ..."),<sup>30</sup> he will unfortunately always have doubts as to  
what God really wants of him.

It is worth noticing that while Oreste rejects Jupiter's  
will he nevertheless accepts the idea that Jupiter created him.  
This is evident when Jupiter tells him:

Jupiter.- Je ne suis pas ton roi, larve  
imprudente. Qui donc t'a créé?





Oreste.- Toi. Mais il ne fallait pas me  
créer libre.<sup>31</sup>

As we have seen in Chapter One, Oreste rejects Jupiter's will because it interferes with his freedom. That is why he says: "... Je suis ma liberté. A peine m'as-tu créé que j'ai cessé de t'appartenir".<sup>32</sup>

Oreste's rejection of Jupiter's will and Jupiter's relationship to the world can be contrasted with Angel's feelings toward God, nature and goodness. As we have seen before, Angel feels alienated from God. This alienation is evident when he says to himself: "Y Dios, ¿dónde está?"<sup>33</sup> Then, after quarreling with his wife Eufemia, he says to himself:

Angel.- ... Es mi animalidad la que así se  
agarra a la vida. Dios mío, ¿por qué  
mi alma no te crea en fuerza de fe?  
Quiero humillarme, ser como los sen-  
cillos, rezar como los niños, maqui-  
nalmente, por rutina... ¡Dame fuerzas,  
Dios mío, fuerzas para que crea en Tí!  
¡Dame fuerzas para que renunciando a  
mí mismo me encuentre al cabo en paz!<sup>34</sup>

This passage shows that Angel's lack of faith in God is what creates all his loneliness. This was apparent before when he said:

Angel.- ... ¡Solo, no; contigo, Dios mío!  
Y Dios, ¿dónde está? ... ¡Ven, ven,  
y llena la soledad de mi alma!<sup>35</sup>



He wants God to replace the loneliness of his soul. He attempts to explain His essence to Eufemia:

Angel.- Mira, Eufemia: la fe crea su objeto...  
 En fuerza de desear algo logramos  
 sacarlo de la nada..., ¿no es así?  
 ¿Qué es Dios más que el deseo infinito,  
 el supremo anhelo de la Humanidad?<sup>36</sup>

To which Eufemia replies:

Eufemia.- Pero, ¿qué te pasa, Angel, qué  
 te pasa? ¡Revienta de una vez...,  
 ábreme tu pecho!

Angel.- ¿Qué me pasa? ¿Qué me pasa? ¿Lo  
 sé yo mismo acaso? No, no tengo  
 alma pura...; estoy expiando algún  
 crimen de antes de que naciera...  
 (Fijándose en el retrato de su  
 madre.) ¿Ves ese cuadro? Parece  
 que me mira mi madre desde más allá  
 de la tumba, desde el misterio si-  
 lencioso... ¿Qué hay allí? Es una  
 obsesión, Eufemia, que no me deja.  
 Esa nada, esa nada terrible que se  
 me presenta en cuanto cierro los  
 ojos... Es una oquedad inmensa...<sup>37</sup>

Up to this point, it is evident that Angel is a man in search of God, and because he cannot create the object of his faith (i.e., God) he feels a terrible loneliness. This lack of faith in the existence of God brings about his unmitigated fear of the nothingness that lies beyond death:

Angel.- ... el espectro de la muerte y tras  
 ella el inmenso vacío eterno.<sup>38</sup>



or,

Angel.- ... una obsesión ... Esa nada, esa nada terrible que se me presenta en cuanto cierro los ojos...<sup>39</sup>

After Angel reads Eufemia's letter stating that she is leaving him, his feeling of loneliness reaches its climax:

Angel.- ...Solo..., solo..., solo...  
Sociedad..., naturaleza...,  
tierra..., cielos..., mundos...  
¡Qué grande todo! ¡Qué grande!  
¡Qué inmensidad! Y yo perdido  
como una gota en este océano  
sin riberas... que me absorbe  
y anula... ¡Qué inmenso todo!  
Y yo solo..., solo..., sin  
poder arrancarme a mí mismo...<sup>40</sup>

It is important to notice that the relationship of God to nature is very close. This becomes apparent after Angel sends his letter of resignation to Moreno and is left alone talking to himself:

Angel.- ... Ahora, a templarme en el recogimiento; a entonar mi corazón, y después, cuando le hiera el Espíritu, que sopla donde quiere, me arrancará limpia y pura mi nota, la mía propia, para que vaya a perderse en la infinita sinfonía, en el cántico universal del amor del Padre... (De pronto sintiendo una violenta palpitación, lanza un gemido y se lleva la mano al pecho, diciendo:) ¡Pobrecillo! ¡Cómo trabajas! Sin descanso.



Tú velas, mientras éste (Pasándose la mano por la frente.) duerme, y si hay peligro, con tus latidos le despiertas. No me cabes en el pecho, ¡pobrecillo! Quieres latir en todo y con todo; palpitar con el universo entero; recibir y devolver su savia eterna, la que viene de los infinitos mundos y a ellos vuelve. ¡Y con tanto anhelar derramarte me ahogas..., si..., me ahogas!... ¡Quién pudiera sorberse así el Espíritu universal! ¡Dios mío! Anégame, ahógame! ¡Que sienta mi vida derretirse en tu seno!<sup>41</sup>

In other words, God is depicted as the "Espíritu universal" who controls the whole universe with His will, "... no hay remedio para la voluntad de Dios."<sup>42</sup>

Throughout La esfinge Angel refers to it as the unifying element of the universe:

Angel.- ... ¡Mundo de pura armonía, de sonidos sin ideas, de libertad absoluta! Palpita en él desligada el alma de las cosas. Mira: gracias a carecer de idea se unen y conciertan y armonizan esas notas... No dicen nada y, por no decir nada, lo dicen todo...<sup>43</sup>

Music exemplifies here the nonconscious elements of the universe, "... Mundo de ... sonidos sin ideas..."<sup>44</sup> Its notes "... se unen y conciertan y armonizan ..." <sup>45</sup>, that is to say, they fit into an order. And this order, exemplified by music, is related to God as Angel said above: "... mi nota ... para que vaya a perderse en la infinita sinfonía,





en el cántico universal al amor del Padre ..."<sup>46</sup> So, God's will is expressed through music, and music symbolises the order in the universe.

This idea of music exemplifying the order in the unconscious universe is similar to the one we saw in Les Mouches, when Jupiter tells Oreste of His law and order:

Jupiter.- ... Vois ces planètes ... c'est moi qui en ai réglé le cours ...  
Entends l'harmonie des sphères,  
cet énorme chant de grâces minéral ...<sup>47</sup>

The relationship between music and the unconscious elements of the universe, is brought out very clearly in Angel's judgement of Martina the maid:

Angel.- Mira: ésa [Martina] apenas piensa. Su aspecto, su mirada, ... es pura música...; toda ella me envuelve en atmósfera de paz...<sup>48</sup>

So, Martina, whom Angel takes as an example of simplicity, is related to music, stressing her affinity with the ordered universe. We should also notice that when Angel says about Martina, "es pura música ... toda ella me envuelve en atmósfera de paz ...",<sup>49</sup> he is indicating that there is a relationship between music (order in the universe) and peace, and that it is with this peace that Angel has been concerned since very early in the play.



He tells Felipe:

Angel.- Sí, sé que no soy nada, pero  
quiero serlo todo. Serlo todo,  
para gozar de la paz del todo.  
¡Paz! ¡Paz! Tú, que eres bueno,  
Felipe, dime: ¿dónde está?<sup>50</sup>

Angel wants peace, a peace found in the ordered universe, as  
he says "... la paz del todo ..."<sup>51</sup>

Again we can see that Angel relates God with peace:

Angel.- Quiero ... ser como los sencillos  
... ¡Dame fuerzas, Dios mío, para  
que renunciando a mí mismo me en-  
cuentre al cabo en paz!<sup>52</sup>

An indication that peace can only be found by man after  
death, that is, by man becoming one with the unconscious world,  
is found in the dialogue between Angel and Joaquín:

Angel.- ... ¡Lo que quiero es paz!...  
¡Paz!... ¡Paz!...

Joaquín.- ¡No la encontrarás hasta la muerte!

Angel.- ¡Pues morir entonces!<sup>53</sup>

The same idea of peace abiding in the unconscious universe  
is found in Les Mouches when Jupiter asks Oreste to return to  
Him and adds:

Jupiter.- ... je suis l'oubli, je suis  
le repos.<sup>54</sup>



Finally, the idea of finding peace in God by becoming one with the unconscious universe is found when Angel tells Felipe:

Angel.- ¿Te acuerdas, Felipe, de un día en que tenías en brazos al mayor de tus hijos, enfermito entonces? ... ¡Y así, al calor de tu pecho, al contacto de tus brazos, bajo tu mirada amorosa, se quedó dormido! ¡No pido más..., nada más! ¡Sólo quiero que el Padre invisible me coja en su regazo, sentir el calor de su inmenso pecho, el ritmo de su respiración, mirarme en su mirada, en ese cielo limpio y puro, y dormir en paz!<sup>55</sup>

Similarly, when Angel is dying at the end of the play, his last words are:

Angel.- ... es el divino abrazo del amor y la muerte....: el abrazo de paz en la agonía... Señor, acuérdate de mí en tu reino... ¡Paz!... ¡Paz!... ¡Paz!...<sup>56</sup>

Since his childhood, Angel has been very much concerned with the idea of being good, as he tells Felipe about his days as a student of don Pascual:

Angel.- ... Cuando salí de la escuela me entregaron al señor cura para que me preparase al ingreso. ¡Pobre don Pascual! Su recuerdo encarna para mí el ámbito maternal de la pobre aldea en que se meció la niñez de mi alma.

.....



Presumía de músico y tenía un viejo clavicordio en que muchas veces le encontré tocando. Y entonces solía quedarme a la puerta, como suspenso y enajenado en aquellos ecos que parecían purificar el ámbito y que, casados al perfume del incienso, me hacían ver en aquel hogar casto la concentración viva de los tranquilos siglos de mi aldea...

.....

Acabada la lección, me acariciaba la barbilla el pobre don Pascual, diciéndome: "¡Conque a ser bueno, Angel!"... Pero el tono, la voz en que parecían vibrar ecos del clavicordio... no lo olvidaré nunca..., ino, nunca! Y, después de todo, en los consejos, como en los demás, es la música lo que da vida, no la letra. Aquí, Felipe, aquí dentro llevo aquel "¡Conque a ser bueno, Angel!" ...

Felipe.- Vamos, Angel, cálmate...; sí, eres bueno...

Angel.- ¡Sólo Dios es bueno!<sup>57</sup>

In this passage, don Pascual is presented as being closely related to music, and, as it has been shown, music represents the order imposed by God on the universe. Don Pascual's advice to Angel: "... a ser bueno...", indicates that goodness lies on the side of nature and the unconscious world. Goodness is only found in God: "Angel: "¡Sólo Dios es bueno!"<sup>58</sup>, a statement which could be compared to Jupiter's:





Jupiter.- ... Le monde est bon; je l'ai créé  
selon ma volonté et je suis le  
Bien.<sup>59</sup>

Angel's statement about the goodness found in God introduces a question of values: if God and nature are good, is man, by opposing them, evil? In Les Mouches, we arrived at the conclusion that man is not evil in breaking the order of the universe, since he did not choose to be born free:

Oreste.- ... tout ton univers ne suffira  
pas à me donner tort.

.....

il ne fallait pas me créer libre.<sup>60</sup>

Contrary to Oreste's views on the guiltlessness of man, Angel regards man as being guilty of his knowledge of good and evil:

Angel.- Sí, Felipe; quiso el hombre ser  
Dios, conocedor de la ciencia del  
bien y del mal, y así que la hubo  
probado, conoció, ante todo, su  
propia desnudez y se vió sujeto  
al trabajo y al progreso...<sup>61</sup>

Ultimately, Angel rejects the pride which resulted from his knowledge of good and evil:

Angel.- ... Con justicia muero...; es el  
pago merecido a mi soberbia...<sup>62</sup>

Hence the theme of freedom is linked to loss of innocence, or the theme of maturity in Unamuno's play. When Felipe comes



to visit Angel for the first time in the play he says:

Felipe.- (Dándole el libro) ¡Ahí lo  
tienes! ¡Tómalo y lee! Él  
calmará tus penas.

Angel.- Las han causado libros; no son  
ellos quienes pueden curármelas  
...<sup>63</sup>

It is apparent in this passage that Angel's sorrows have been caused by knowledge, in this instance expressed metaphorically by the word "books". The metaphor is maintained as the play continues:

Felipe.- ¡Desecha esas aprensiones y vuelve  
a tu niñez!

Angel.- Sí, hay que hacerse niño para en-  
trar en el reino de los cielos.  
Pero tú sabes cómo me perdió la  
ciudad. A ella vine; a devorar  
libros.

.....

Y en la edad en que empieza a cos-  
quillear la carne, me cosquilleó  
el espíritu. El amor naciente fué  
fuerza intelectual en mí. Quise  
racionalizar mi fe. Tú sabes cómo  
me di a bucear en los más intrín-  
cados problemas, y cómo en la edad  
en que despierta en nuestra alma  
la humanidad eterna ansiaba abarcar  
bajo mi mirada al universo entero...  
Tú conoces los años de mi carrera...

.....

Tú sabes mis tristezas. Y ¡cómo  
me acompañaba durante ellas aquel  
"¡Conque a ser bueno, Angel!" del  
pobre don Pascual!<sup>64</sup>



Knowledge is responsible for Angel's sadness. Loss of youth is linked to knowledge, and Felipe tells Angel to abandon his intellectual worries and return to his youth. The same idea expressed in these words:

Angel.- ... he nacido para la sociedad.  
El progreso está en libertarse  
del terruño...

Felipe.- Y la felicidad en volver a él...  
¡Elige!<sup>65</sup>

shows that happiness is only found in innocence. That is, life in the country represents the life of humanity's youth in close communion with nature. It is a life of innocence as opposed to a life of knowledge (progress) which Angel implies exists in the city.

Angel comments on the youth of one of Felipe's sons:

Angel.- ...¿Qué será de él? ¡Esta es la  
edad de la libertad, Felipe! Pronto  
se le abrirán los caminos de la vida;  
tendrá que elegir uno, uno solo, re-  
nunciando a todos los demás, y una  
vez elegido no podrá ya desandarlo.<sup>66</sup>  
¡El tiempo no se dobla ni revierte!

Here, "libertad", should be taken to mean the same "liberté d'attente", we find in Philèbe's freedom in Les Mouches, before he chose the act that made him Oreste. Angel is stressing also the irrevocability of the past; that is, once a path has been chosen, there is no way in which it can be avoided.



The theme of the loss of innocence is allegorically presented in the play by the Biblical account of Adam and Eve, told by Felipe to his sons. Angel afterwards comments:

Angel.- Sí, Felipe; quiso el hombre ser  
Dios, conocedor de la ciencia del  
bien y del mal, y así que la hubo  
probado, conoció ante todo, su  
propia desnudez y se vió sujeto  
al trabajo y al progreso...<sup>67</sup>

In other words, Angel implies that once aware of the existence of good and evil, man has become like a god; that is, free to choose what is good and what is evil. It is precisely this knowledge of good and evil which Unamuno calls a disease, a tragic disease:

...Y es una verdadera enfermedad, y trágica,  
la que nos da el apetito de conocer por  
gusto del conocimiento mismo, por el delei-  
te de probar de la fruta del árbol de la  
ciencia del bien y del mal.<sup>68</sup>

Let us examine the expressions of Angel's feelings toward innocence and youth. Angel wishes to be an innocent youth, as he tells his wife:

Angel.- Sólo te pido que adormezcas mi  
vida, que me cantes el canto  
de cuna... Tú no sabes lo que  
sufro...<sup>69</sup>

It is, in fact, the loss of his innocence and youth which prevents him from having faith in God, and hence it produces his





anguish:

Angel.- ... Dios mío, ¿por qué mi alma no  
te crea en fuerza de fe? Quiero  
humillarme, ser como los sencillos,  
rezar como de niño, maquinalmente  
...<sup>70</sup>

Even at the end of the play, Angel, fatally wounded, wishes  
to be able to return to his childhood. He tells Eufemia:

Angel.- ¡Así..., así..., Eufemia...,  
así..., hijo..., hijo tuyo! ¿No  
querías ser madre? Y me tenías  
a mí, al niño de siempre..., a  
tu hijo..., a tu hijo enfermo...<sup>71</sup>

and adds "Cántame el canto de cuna para el sueño que no acaba...",<sup>72</sup>  
as he speaks his last words.

In other words, Angel does not face courageously his freedom  
to choose, but, on the contrary, wishes a return to the state  
of innocence which characterizes youth. Angel's final act is  
completely different from that of Oreste's, since the latter  
faces with dignity his freedom and its consequences.

At the end of the play, Angel feels a certain duty toward  
the mob which comes to lynch him:

Angel.- ¡No, a huir no! ¡A ponerme al  
frente de ellos para encauzar-  
los; a impedir mayores males..

.....

me asomaré a decirles cuatro pa-  
labras de corazón ...<sup>73</sup>



Angel.- Sí, ¡Viva la libertad! ... ¡Viva la libertad!, que es la vida ... (Voces de "¡Fuera el sermón!" "¡Mueran los traidores!"...) Pedís libertad y venís a quitármela; no quereís que sea como soy ... Sois unos cobardes... (El tumulto crece; arrecian las pedradas y suena un tiro ...) <sup>74</sup>

Obviously, the mob does not understand Angel and, consequently, fails to sympathize with his dilemma.

Let us now summarize the comparisons we have established between Les Mouches and La esfinge. In both plays man suffers solitude as a result of his alienation from himself, from others, from nature, and from God. As man becomes aware of his freedom he loses his innocence, and this leads him to suffer anguish. Man is left alone to choose his own values, thus forming his own order.

We have also found differences between these two plays. In Les Mouches Oreste refuses to subordinate his freedom to either men or God; whereas in La esfinge, Angel refuses to take orders from men, but willingly subordinates his freedom to God. Second, in Les Mouches man is not evil because his freedom, which alienates him from nature and God, is gratuitously given to him. In La esfinge man is considered evil when he is not willing to give up his freedom to God. Third, Oreste accepts the responsibility of making choices and the implied anguish. Angel, in order to escape anguish, "saves" himself



by relinquishing his freedom to God.

Are these plays tragic according to Sartre's and Unamuno's own theories of the theatre? Are the themes tragic in the light of Aristotle's, Hegel's, and Nietzsche's concepts of tragedy? These are the questions we shall answer in the next chapter.



NOTES TO CHAPTER II

1  
Miguel de Unamuno, "La esfinge", in Teatro completo  
(Madrid, 1959), p. 208.

2  
Ibid., p. 203.

3  
Ibid., pp. 204-205.

4  
Ibid., p. 205.

5  
Ibid., pp. 270-271.

6  
Ibid., p. 206.

7  
Jean-Paul Sartre, "Les Mouches", in Théâtre, 34th  
ed. (Paris, 1947), p. 80.

8  
Unamuno, Teatro completo, pp. 206-207.

9  
Ibid., p. 207.

10  
Ibid., pp. 208-209.

11  
Ibid., p. 216.

12  
Ibid., pp. 211-213.

13  
Unamuno, Teatro completo, p. 230.

14  
Ibid., p. 280.





- 15  
Sartre, Théâtre, p. 60.
- 16  
Unamuno, Teatro completo, p. 230.
- 17  
Sartre, Théâtre, p. 84.
- 18  
Unamuno, Teatro completo, p. 231.
- 19  
Ibid., p. 215.
- 20  
Sartre, Théâtre, p. 98.
- 21  
Unamuno, Teatro completo, p. 234.
- 22  
Ibid., p. 264.
- 23  
Ibid., p. 264.
- 24  
Ibid., p. 289.
- 25  
Sartre, Théâtre, p. 63.
- 26  
Unamuno, Teatro completo, p. 281.
- 27  
Sartre, Théâtre, p. 62.
- 28  
Ibid., p. 63.
- 29  
Unamuno, Teatro completo, p. 280.
- 30  
Ibid., p. 281.



- 31  
Sartre, Théâtre, p. 99.
- 32  
Ibid., p. 100.
- 33  
Unamuno, Teatro completo, p. 271.
- 34  
Ibid., p. 227.
- 35  
Ibid., p. 271.
- 36  
Ibid., p. 250.
- 37  
Ibid., p. 250.
- 38  
Ibid., p. 216.
- 39  
Ibid., p. 250.
- 40  
Ibid., p. 268.
- 41  
Ibid., pp. 235-236.
- 42  
Ibid., p. 229.
- 43  
Ibid., pp. 223-224.
- 44  
Ibid., pp. 223-224.
- 45  
Ibid., p. 224.
- 46  
Ibid., p. 235.
- 47  
Sartre, Théâtre, p. 98.



48

Unamuno, Teatro completo, p. 254.

49

Ibid., p. 254.

50

Ibid., p. 216.

51

Ibid., p. 216.

52

Ibid., p. 227.

53

Ibid., p. 261.

54

Sartre, Théâtre, p. 101.

55

Unamuno, Teatro completo, pp. 281-282.

56

Ibid., p. 296.

57

Ibid., pp. 277-278.

58

Ibid., p. 278.

59

Sartre, Théâtre, p. 98.

60

Ibid., p. 99.

61

Unamuno, Teatro completo, pp. 275-276.

62

Ibid., p. 296.

63

Ibid., p. 214.



64

Ibid., pp. 278-279.

65

Ibid., p. 215.

66

Ibid., p. 275.

67

Ibid., pp. 275-276.

68

Miguel de Unamuno, Del sentimiento trágico de la vida  
(New York, s.a.), p. 25.

69

Unamuno, Teatro completo, p. 226.

70

Ibid., p. 227.

71

Ibid., p. 293.

72

Ibid., p. 296.

73

Ibid., pp. 287-288.

74

Ibid., p. 289.





CHAPTER III

LES MOUCHES AND LA ESFINGE AS TRAGEDIES



There exists a considerably body of criticism dealing with both Sartre's and Unamuno's works. The first task we undertake in this chapter is to examine the critical appraisal the plays in question have received. Our next task is to look at Unamuno's and Sartre's views on the theatre, and specifically on tragedy. Ultimately we attempt to assess Les Mouches and La esfinge in the light of Aristotelian, Hegelian, and Nietzschean views on tragedy.

There are certain themes that recur in the body of criticism of Sartre's plays. We shall deal with those that refer specifically to Les Mouches. No attempt will be made to mention all the themes that appear in the representative critical articles or books that will be dealt with in this section.

Critics consistently refer to certain aspects of Sartre's Les Mouches, although they may disagree among themselves as to the interpretation of those aspects. We can establish the common ground of the criticism very schematically. Commentators on Les Mouches give varying degrees of importance to the following topics: the historical-political context of the play, that is, the German occupation of France; affinities with the Greek sources; the function of myth in existentialist philosophy and art; Oreste as a hero; modern conception of the theatre as opposed to the Greek conception; Les Mouches as a literary genre.



All the critics observe the relationship between "the message of the play", and the Nazi occupation. Dorothy McCall in The Theatre of Jean-Paul Sartre<sup>1</sup> elaborates on this topic. She states that Les Mouches can be read as an allegory: Egisthe is the German invader; Clytemnestra the French collaborator; Oreste the resistant; Electra the French citizen who rebelled against the Vichy government, but lacked the will to action. Over all is Jupiter, who stands for the "moral" commandments that the Nazis imposed on the French people as absolute law.

The Greek sources of Sartre's play are obvious. D. J. Conacher's "Oreste as Existential Hero" points to some basic similarities between Sartrean theatre and Greek classical theatre, especially that of Aeschylus. Sartre's orientation and the Greeks' is toward a theatre of situation.

In both theatres the dramatic development is vertical, all forces being concentrated on a single issue which is presented as approaching its crucial moment as the action of the play begins.<sup>2</sup>

For the Greeks "passion was never a storm of sentiment, but fundamentally always the assertion of a right"<sup>3</sup>. Sartre sees his drama as a "return to the concept of tragedy as the Greeks saw it".<sup>4</sup> According to Conacher in both Greek and Sartrean drama "... the decisive actions taken are 'affirmations



of systems of values and rights' which have universal application."<sup>5</sup>

The concomitants of existentialist philosophy are well known: freedom, responsibility, anguish, alienation, etc. Harry Slochower in "The Function of Myth in Existentialism"<sup>6</sup> applies the concept of literary myth to existentialism. He specifies three steps in the literary myth: the initial stage out of which the ego is born; the revolt of the individual against the mythical collective; the ego finds reconciliation with, and rehabilitation in his collective. But, he argues, existentialism has seized on one aspect of the literary myth and raised it to an absolute. It lives exclusively in the second stage: negation of the old collectivity ("essences", "metaphysics", etc.). It accepts homelessness, estrangement, fear, and anguish as a final point. He sums up his argument against existentialism:

Existentialism has emptied the mythical collective and transformed it into a primeval abyss. In it man begins and ends with nothing.... In sum, it deprives the myth of its communal status and dignity.<sup>7</sup>

While we agree with much of Slochower's' analysis of myth and existentialism, the question he begs is: Is the function of existentialism to fulfill the steps of the traditional literary myth?

The nature of Orestes heroism has been dealt with by some





critics. Is Orestes an existentialist hero? Is he a Romantic hero? Is he a Nietzschean superman? The answer to the first question has been dealt with in Chapter I. For Dorothy McCall, Orestes resembles more a romantic new force qui va than a "liberté en situation". He is fascinated with his dark destiny; he knows he is gloriously doomed. He acts, not with the fear and trembling of an individual who recognizes the risks inherent in every commitment, but with a kind of exalted joy.<sup>8</sup>

For Kaufman the central difference between the Greek and Sartre's versions of the Orestes myth lies in the motivation for the act. And to understand the crucial innovation, Sartre's philosophy is less helpful than Nietzsche's. According to Kaufmann Nietzsche's influence on Les Mouches was immense. He notes the similarities between passages from Nietzsche's Thus Spake Zarathustra (1883-1892) and Ecce Homo (1888) and Les Mouches. In Nietzsche, as well as in Sartre, we find the theme of man's solidarity with other men as man "steals" their feeling of guilt without taking punishment. Oreste becomes a great anti-christian savior figure --a truly Nietzschean hero.<sup>9</sup> Sartre's attitude toward death as essentially natural and his attitude toward guilt feelings are Nietzschean. The idea that it is nobler to take guilt<sup>10</sup> upon oneself than to accept punishment is not Sophoclean but



Nietzschean.

The theme of man's freedom as seen in Les Mouches (Orestes' discovery that no one can give him orders) is reminiscent of Nietzsche's Beyond Good and Evil (1886). Man gives himself his right and wrong, and loneliness descends upon those who leave the herd and its God-given values. The phrase "Man's life begins on the other side of despair" is an echo of Nietzsche contra Wagner (1888). Indeed, the final metaphor of Les Mouches, that of the pied piper, is repeatedly used by Nietzsche in connection with the ideal man.

We shall treat the last two topics mentioned above (namely, the modern conception of the theatre as opposed to the Greek conception, and the place of Les Mouches in a literary tradition) jointly. According to Champigny the unity of the work in both the Greek sources and in Les Mouches is provided by the moral point of view.<sup>11</sup> The Greek dramatist placed the emphasis on the "objective" aspect of morals: social and religious rules, taboos, rights, customs, order, etc. Sartre, on the contrary, stresses the subjective foundations of morals: moral freedom and responsibility, man as the creator of values, rather than as the servant of laws.<sup>12</sup> Modern man's concept of the Athenian drama. Our education gives to moral freedom a scope which the Greek pattern did not permit.<sup>13</sup> The revelation of freedom is not tragic in itself. It becomes tragic if it is seen against the overwhelming background of being, of nature,



or of other freedoms. Then conscience, or consciousness, may be properly called a "disease" as Unamuno does. It tears man from the plenitude of being, from the innocence of nature, without providing another abode.<sup>14</sup>

Sartre distinguishes between freedom and power. Freedom appears to be fundamentally moral; but freedom without power is a mockery. It is this mockery which constitutes the tragic. As Sartre puts it: "To be free is not to be able to do what one likes, it is to will what one can do."<sup>15</sup> Practical power is not refused to Orestes, from this point of view, Les Mouches is not a tragedy. In this light, Les Mouches is a drama, as it is subtitled. It can even be called a romantic drama, or an epic drama. We witness in Orestes the triumph of the individual.<sup>16</sup>

Orestes succeeds from the point of view of poetic morals. He assumes his freedom. He succumbs to neither physical fate nor to psychological fate. But he does fail if his behavior is judged from the point of view of social morality, namely, his relationship to the Arguites.<sup>17</sup>

Les Mouches can be considered a satire; the satirical intention of the play is announced by the title, The Flies, which reminds us of the comedies of Aristophanes. It is an epic or a lyrical drama as far as Oreste is concerned. Between the two, between the Arguites and Orestes, there



arises a mild, but in our opinion, very pure form of tragedy for it is free from pathos.<sup>18</sup>

Let us introduce now Sartre's own ideas on tragedy as he states them in his article Forgers of Myths, the Young Playwright of France, (1946) and then see if these ideas are found in Les Mouches.

Sartre begins by stating that his purpose is not to write philosophic plays "intended to set forth on the stage the philosophy of Marx, St. Thomas or existentialism."<sup>19</sup> He discards the concept of tragedy as the representation of human nature "which may alter under the impact of a given situation."<sup>20</sup> He also repudiates the representation of passion "explained purely on the grounds of heredity, environment and situations."<sup>21</sup> What he is interested in is to show human beings when they find themselves in limit situations "which enclose...[them]... on all sides."<sup>22</sup>

Above all, Sartre stresses that his plays must show free man choosing for everyone else when he chooses for himself in a given situation. In this sense his theatre aims at being "moral"<sup>23</sup> as it shows a free man responsible for his choice, and also responsible for the effect of his choice on others.

Sartre claims that his theatre returns "to the concept of tragedy as the Greeks saw it"<sup>24</sup> in the sense that -as Hegel has pointed out- they show passion as the assertion of





a right. Sartre states that his theatre follows Corneille's view: "the study of the conflict of characters ... [his] ... replaced by the presentation of the conflict of rights, ... the system of values, of ethics and of concepts of man which are lined up against each other."<sup>25</sup> Thus we see that there is a direct line from the Greeks, through Corneille, and down to Sartre in that they see passion as the assertion of a right. This passion brings about a conflict which is not necessarily personal, but rather has to do with a conflict of rights.

Sartre also rejects the so-called "realistic theatre" because it has favored to show how man is beaten by external forces.<sup>26</sup>

Sartre prefers the theatre of myth to that of symbols. By presenting to the public, myths such as "the great myth of death, exile, love"<sup>27</sup> which constitute the people's most general preoccupations Sartre hopes to dispell its anxieties.<sup>28</sup> This fulfills the cathartic aims of his theatre.

Sartre points out that his theatre is also closer to classic tragedy, as it shows th situation represented in the play at the time of almost reaching its climax. Also, he intimates that his theatre tries to abide by the rule of the three unities, as his plays are "centered around one single event; there are few players [in it] and the story is



compressed within a short space of time.<sup>29</sup>

Sartre also insists that his theatre should be "a great collective, religious phenomenon."<sup>30</sup> For this purpose a certain distance between play and audience should be maintained at all times.<sup>31</sup> In this aspect, Sartre's theatre is also close to Greek tragedy, which was in its origin and in its continuation a religious ceremony. Finally, Sartre summarizes his theatre as "austere, moral, mythic and ceremonial in aspect."<sup>32</sup>

We can now proceed to see if Sartre's ideas on tragedy are found in Les Mouches. Oreste is not moved to kill Egisthe and Clytemnestre by the passion to avenge his father's murder by them. Thus, Oreste's act is not explained by heredity. He actually breaks away from the tradition of the House of Atreus as he does not act in order to avenge his father's murder. Rather, in him, passion is the assertion of a right, the right to commit his freedom to the Arguities and thus free them from tyranny. The play has a strong moral overtone, as it shows Oreste choosing an act which will hopefully restore a sense of morality to the Arguities.

The play also shows "human beings in limit situations". Since Oreste arrives in Argos at the beginning of the play, he is confronted with a limit situation since he is obliged to make choices of decisive consequences not only for himself but for others as well. In other words, he is forced to commit his "liberté d'attente" in one way or another. We should



observe also that this limit situation is very near its climax when, at the beginning of the play, Oreste's considerations before making his choice are expressed. Immediately we come upon the climax of this situation as Oreste chooses and carries out his choice.

The rule of the three unities is kept faithfully: the action that takes place in Acts I and II happens during the day of the Death and the action of Act III during the morning of the next day. There is also unity of place: Argos. And finally, unity of action as it revolves mainly around Oreste and Electre.

Then, Sartre uses an old Greek myth in order to bring to his public a vision of "its most general preoccupations"<sup>33</sup>: that of France during the Nazi occupation. In fact, as Jeanson suggests, we could substitute Argos for the France of 1943, Egisthe for the German invader, Clytemnestre for the French collaborator, Electre for the hatred inherent in the French people for the German invader, and Oreste for a member of the Resistance.<sup>34</sup>

In this sense, as the play shows the victory of Oreste over the Jupiter-Egisthe's regime, it could have well hoped to dispel the anxieties<sup>35</sup> of the French people at the time of the Occupation.

Also, by using myth to convey to the audience a very true-to-life, present situation (in 1943), Sartre is increasing "the distance between play and audience"<sup>36</sup> in



order to maintain the social and religious function of the theatre which would be lost if the play were not to resemble a rite of ceremony.

Finally, and of most importance, we find in Les Mouches what constitutes Sartre's main aim in the theatre: to present "the anguish of a man who is both free and full of good will, who in all sincerity is trying to find out the side he must take, and who knows that when he chooses the lot of others he is at the same time choosing his own pattern of behavior and is deciding once and for all whether he is to be a tyrant or a democrat."<sup>37</sup> This statement is an accurate portrayal of Oreste, as we see him committing his freedom in good-will to liberate the people of Argos from tyranny and, at the same time accepting the anguish of the responsibility resulting from his choice.

We shall now analyse Les Mouches in the light of Aristotle's theory of tragedy. Our purpose in so doing is to establish whether or not this play exhibits certain characteristics germane to Greek tragedy. Following this analysis we shall examine Hegel's and Nietzsche's views on tragedy and apply them to Les Mouches.





The question, "What is tragedy?", has been the preoccupation of philosophers and literary scholars for many centuries since tragedies were written by the Greeks in the Sixth Century B.C. Even though the Greeks were able to write tragedies, when it came to the point of defining them, they were at best vague in their definitions.

Let us take as an example Aristotle. In his Poetics he attempts to define tragedy:

Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear affecting the proper purgation of these emotions.<sup>38</sup>

This definition of tragedy is very objective up to the last point dealing with pity and fear. Henceforth it becomes vague since what might produce fear and pity in one person does not necessarily cause them in another. Therefore, a definition of tragedy as the representation of an action which moves the audience to feel pity and fear is a very subjective definition. Nevertheless, Aristotle clarifies somewhat the last point of his definition as he says:

Let us then determine what are the circumstances which strike us as terrible or pitiful.

Action capable of this effect must happen between persons who are either friends or enemies or indifferent to one another... But when the



tragic incident occurs between those who are near or dear to one another ... these are the situations to be looked for by the poet ...<sup>39</sup>

Then, our question at this point is this: is Les Mouches to be considered a tragedy according to Aristotle's definition? Let us proceed to analyse Les Mouches in the light of Aristotle's theory of tragedy.

First of all, let us see what action is imitated in Les Mouches: Oreste arrives in Argos knowing his true identity (he is the son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestre) and knowing of the murder of his father by Egisthe and Clytemnestre. He decides to kill the last two, which he does. We should notice that this is the action, properly speaking, of the play. This is what happens in the external world of the play. But now, we should consider the interior world of the play, which is composed of the "action" which takes place in Oreste's mind. This action moves towards a discovery; that is, Oreste discovers step by step the fact that he is free to choose his own values.

Referring again to Aristotle's definition of tragedy we learn about the reversal in the action:

Reversal of the situation is a change by which the action veers round to its opposite, subject always to our rule of probability or necessity...<sup>40</sup>

In Act I of Les Mouches, Oreste is ready to leave Argos. Sometime later, after Oreste meets Electre, he is not sure



whether or not he is leaving Argos:

Electre.- ... Vas-tu rester longtemps?

Oreste.- Je devais partir aujourd'hui  
même. Et puis à présent...

Electre.- A présent?

Oreste.- Je ne sais plus.<sup>41</sup>

Finally, Oreste decides not to leave Argos at all:

Oreste.- Je ne pars plus.<sup>42</sup>

So here we find that the reversal of the situation is in accordance with the law of probability, since Oreste changes his mind to leave Argos because he feels pity for Electre after she tells him how mistreated she is by everybody in Argos.

Now, Aristotle tells us that:

...Recognition, as the name indicates, is a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune. The best form of recognition is coincident with a Reversal of the Situation ...<sup>43</sup>

Oreste knows his true identity since his tutor had revealed it to him before they arrived at Argos:

Le Pédagogue.- ... Ces derniers mois -pour être exact, depuis que je vous ai révélé votre naissance- je vous voyais changer de jour en jour ...<sup>44</sup>



Oreste is also aware of the identity of Electre, Clytemnestre and Egisthe. Although he does not know them personally when he arrives at Argos, at least he knows that they live in that city and that he would likely meet them if he stayed there. On the other hand, Electre does not at first know Oreste's true identity since the latter introduces himself to her as Philèbe. But when Oreste finally tells Electre that he is her brother, she at first does not believe it. She gradually accepts his revelation, as Oreste begins to talk more and more like the Oreste of Electre's dreams:

Electre.- Oui. C'est bien toi. Tu es Oreste.  
 Je ne te reconnais pas, car ce n'est  
 pas ainsi que je t'attendais ...  
 Oreste, tu es mon frère aîné ...  
 prends-moi dans tes bras, protège-moi,  
 car nous allons au-devant de très  
 grandes souffrances.<sup>45</sup>

After Oreste has murdered Egisthe and Clytemnestre, Electre feels love for him:

Electre.- Prends-moi dans tes bras, mon bien-  
 aimé ... M'aimes-tu?  
 .....  
 Je t'aime. Il faut que je pense que  
 je t'aime...<sup>46</sup>

But, when Electre and Oreste take refuge in Apollo's Temple, there is another reversal of the situation, for Electre's remorse prompts her to feel hatred for Oreste:





Electre.- Qui es-tu, toi? Ah! Tu es Oreste  
Va-t-en.

Oreste.- Qu'as-tu donc?

Electre.- Tu me fais peur ... laisse-moi.  
Ne me touche pas...<sup>47</sup>

.....

Electre.- Ha! Je te hais.<sup>48</sup>

Another act of recognition takes place between Oreste and Egisthe, when the former comes to the Royal Palace to murder the latter:

Egisthe.- C'est dont toi, Oreste?

Oreste.- Défends-toi!

Egisthe.- Je ne me défendrai pas... je veux  
que tu m'assassines.

Oreste.- C'est bon. Le moyen m'importe peu  
Je serai donc assassin.

.....

Egisthe.- Soyez maudits tous deux.<sup>49</sup>

As we can see, the recognition of Oreste by Egisthe leads to a feeling of hatred of the latter for the former.

Now, we come back to the action which takes place in Oreste's mind. This action moves toward Oreste's discovery of his freedom. From the moment that Oreste discovers the subjectivity of values (Acte II, Tableau I, scène IV), and hence, learns that he is free to choose, he is also engaged



in the process of discovering himself. He is aware now that his youth is fleeing from him as he acquires knowledge of his freedom:

Oreste.- Attends. Laisse-moi dire adieu à  
cette légèreté sans tache qui fut  
la mienne. Laisse-moi dire adieu à  
ma jeunesse.<sup>50</sup>

As he asks Jupiter for an indication of what path to follow, Oreste discovers that he must find his own path:

Oreste.- Alors...c'est ça le Bien?...Le Bien.  
Leur Bien...

.....

Il y a un autre chemin.

.....

Des ordres?... Personne ne peut plus  
me donner d'ordre à présent.

.....

Je te dis qu'il y a un autre chemin...,  
mon chemin.<sup>51</sup>

At this point we should introduce Aristotle's comment on the tragic flaw:

... There remains, then, the character... of a man who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty...<sup>52</sup>

and on the nature of the change of fortune:



... The change of fortune should be not from bad to good, but reversely, from good to bad.<sup>53</sup>

So in the action which takes place in Oreste's mind, it is the knowledge of his freedom which could be considered his tragic flaw, since it is this knowledge which prompts him to feel at the same level as a God:

Oreste.- ...tout à coup, la liberté a fondu sur moi et m'a transi, la nature a sauté en arrière... et je me suis senti tout seul, au milieu de ton petit monde bénin... et il n'y a plus rien eu au ciel, ni Bien, ni Mal, ni personne pour me donner des ordres.<sup>54</sup>

Although Oreste feels that the knowledge of his freedom causes pain:

Jupiter.- ... Ta liberté n'est qu'une gale qui te démange, elle n'est qu'un exil.

Oreste.- Tu dis vrai: un exil.<sup>55</sup>

he nevertheless, goes beyond this suffering and asserts the value of the life which he chooses as his own:

Oreste.- Etranger à moi-même, je sais. Hors nature, contre nature, sans excuse, sans autre recours qu'en moi... Je suis condamné à n'avoir d'autre loi que la mienne... Car je suis un homme, Jupiter, et chaque homme doit inventer son chemin.

.....

... la vie humaine commence de l'autre côté du désespoir.<sup>56</sup>



In other words, Oreste is not a tragic hero in the sense that Aristotle understood the term. Oreste is found in an adverse situation (i.e. the one caused by the suffering resulting from the knowledge of his freedom); but he goes beyond it, and comes out of it triumphant in that he does not feel remorse for the murder he committed while exercising his freedom of choice to the fullest extent. He also comes out triumphant from this situation since his crime gave him reason to justify his life:

Oreste.- ... mon crime ... est ma raison de  
vivre et mon orgueil, ... Pour moi  
aussi la vie commence. Une étrange  
vie.<sup>57</sup>

Electre, on the other hand, portrays better than Oreste the characteristics of a tragic hero. That is, she has thought of avenging the murder of her father for many years. When the opportunity to do so arrives with Oreste, she takes it; then, after the crime is accomplished by Oreste with her collaboration, she feels remorse, renounces her part in the crime, and offers to Jupiter to atone for it:

Electre.- ... Jupiter ... Je suivrai ta loi,  
je serai ton esclave ... Défends-moi  
contre les mouches, contre mon frère,  
contre moi-même, ... je consacrerai  
ma vie entière à l'expiation. Je me  
repens, Jupiter, je me repens.<sup>58</sup>





Let us pause now to consider Nietzsche's views of the effect that a true tragedy has on the audience:

... The metaphysical comfort -with which every true tragedy leaves us- that, in spite of the flux of phenomena, life at bottom is indestructibly powerful and pleasurable...<sup>59</sup>

Nietzsche's concept of the effect of tragedy on the audience is closely related to Aristotle's: that it should "through pity and fear [effect] the proper purgation of these emotions."<sup>60</sup> That is, that tragedy should at the end leave the audience with a feeling of optimism toward life by asserting that life, even if it means suffering is, in the long run, worth living.

So, in answering our original question: is Les Mouches a tragedy according to Aristotle's concept of tragedy (elaborated by Nietzsche)? our answer must be yes. Les Mouches contains many elements of true tragedy: Electre's stature of a tragic heroine, and the assertion at the end of the play that life is worth living. On the other hand, Oreste does not qualify completely to be a true tragic hero as Aristotle understood it, since, as we have seen, he is not crushed by life as the result of his tragic flaw, but, on the contrary, he comes out triumphant at the end of the play.

It is evident that this evaluation of Les Mouches as tragedy is one based strictly on structure, since Aristotle's approach answers the questions "what and how is tragedy?" with



little if any concern for the philosophical implications involved in the structure. He does not address himself to the question "why tragedy?"

The rediscovery during the Middle Ages of Aristotle's theory on tragedy and the subsequent neo-classical evaluation of the same (Cf. Corneille's Discours des trois unités and Boileau's L'Art poétique) show still a concern with the problems of form. It is not until the nineteenth century that the first definition of tragedy from a truly metaphysical point of view is attempted.

For several centuries the philosophical implication of tragedy remained hidden to the European mind, although they were always present in tragedy. It was Hegel, an idealist, who brought them to light; according to A.C. Bradley, Hegel was the first since Aristotle to examine tragedy in an "original and searching" manner.<sup>61</sup> This is true, we believe, because those who wrote on tragedy before Hegel followed or tried to follow Aristotelian rules; whereas Hegel breaks away from this tradition and attempts to define tragedy primarily from its philosophical implications. Perhaps Hegel was able to break away from the Aristotelian approach because the former sees Being -like Nietzsche- as "ever-suffering and contradictory", whereas for Aristotle and his followers "Being is necessarily [as for Plato] unified and tranquil".<sup>62</sup>



Consequently, since the philosophical implications of tragedy are based -as we shall see- on this contradictory quality of Being, Aristotle and his followers were unable to discern them precisely because of their views of Being as "unified and tranquil".

Most of what Hegel wrote on tragedy is found in his Aesthetik. Bradley, who has summarized Hegel's theory on the subject,<sup>63</sup> begins by talking about the elements that constitute tragedy: first, he says "that in all tragedy there is some sort of collision or conflict..."<sup>64</sup> He goes on to say that "it may be taken for granted that a tragedy is a story of unhappiness or suffering, and excites such feelings as pity and fear."<sup>65</sup> Bradley continues saying that:

Hegel says very little of this; partly, perhaps, because it is obvious, but more because the essential point to him is not the suffering but its cause, namely, the action or conflict.<sup>66</sup>

For Hegel, according to Bradley, the tragic conflict is between powers that rule the world of man's will and action -his "ethical substance."<sup>67</sup> This war is not so much between good and evil as it is between good and good. Although they are in themselves rightful, each force ignores the right of the other. Hence the conflict because absolute rightfulness belongs to the Whole and not to any of its parts.<sup>68</sup>

The end of the tragic conflict is the denial of the



exclusive claims of each part. Sometimes the conflict can be resolved peacefully by means of a compromise. The hero by an act of self-condemnation and purification reconciles himself with the whole. But sometimes, the conflict is pressed to extremes, leading to the death of one or more of the persons involved. For Hegel even in this last case there is an aspect of reconciliation. What is denied is not the right of each power but the exclusive assertion of each right.<sup>69</sup>

It may be said that the conflict arises from the nature of the tragic hero. His greatness and his doom lie in the fact that he identifies wholly with the power that moves him, and does not recognize the claim of the other power.<sup>70</sup>

Another crucial point in Hegel's conception of the hero is the nature of the hero's suffering and guilt. For Hegel tragic suffering can only be experienced by active individuals as the result of some act of their own for which they are answerable with their whole self.<sup>71</sup>

In his Philosophy of Right (1821), Hegel states that for the Greek tragic hero there was no difference between deed and action, "between the external event and premeditation and knowledge of the circumstances... [He]... accepts ... [his] ... guilt for the whole range of the deed."<sup>72</sup>

Kaufmann interestingly notes:

Hegel's perceptive comments show ... how Sartre existentialism revives the heroic ethos of





Sophocles. A man is his deeds and his life, and to plead that one's intentions were better than one's works is, according to Sartre, a mark of bad faith.<sup>73</sup>

Kaufmann continues:

We do not really admire those who harbor [guilt feelings] in a situation in which they are not to be blamed. The mot juste is not tragic guilt but tragic responsibility, because, responsibility like pride, is something one can take.<sup>74</sup>

If we now analyse Les Mouches in the light of Hegel's views on tragedy, we should establish first of all what are the elements in conflict in this play, and whether these elements represent some good in their own right; and if so, what reconciliation -if any- is attained between these elements at the end of the play. Once these points have been established, we should turn our attention to the "suffering" of the tragic hero and find out if it is the result of "guilt" or "tragic responsibility" as Kaufmann suggests.

In Aeschylus' The Libation Bearers, the tragic conflict seems to be between two rights: love for the father vs. love for the mother. Orestes is the material means through whom this dilemma is to be presented. He finds himself in a situation in which he cannot avoid choosing one or the other; if he acts by killing his mother, his love for his father will triumph, if he does not act, he will give priority to his love for his mother. In both cases two rights are placed in



opposition and the assertion of one will exclude the other. Orestes will choose his love for his father by killing his mother and in so doing he is motivated by a desire to avenge his father's murder. Finally, he will feel remorse for his crime.

When we analyse the motivation of Sartre's Oreste; we find that, in contrast to Aeschylus' Orestes, Sartre's is not moved to act by revenge for his father, but rather by a need to commit his freedom to a cause (the people of Argos) and in so doing to liberate them from their oppression by Egisthe and Clytemnestre.

Thus, in Sartre's play the emphasis of the conflict in question is shifted from Aeschylus' category of father's right vs. mother's right to a conflict between individual freedom and responsibility on the one hand, and on the other Church and State (represented by Jupiter and Egisthe). Both in Aeschylus' and Sartre's plays the means of asserting one right over the other is through action or non-action.

As for the tragic conflict, Sartre agrees with Hegel's views:

The people in our plays will be distinct from one another - not as a coward is from a miser or a miser from a brave man, but rather as actions are divergent or clashing, as right may conflict with right.<sup>75</sup>

Oreste finds himself in a position to choose between the "old order" and the "new subjectivity"; obviously, if he does



not act by destroying the guardians of the "old morality" he would be asserting through his inaction the validity of the old order; on the other hand, by taking action against Egisthe and Clytemnestre, he destroys the physical aspect of the old order, and by refusing to pay homage to Jupiter through the expression of guilt feelings he is annihilating the metaphysical background on which the said order exists.

Both the "old order" and the "new order" have a *raison d'être*, each in its own right; the former provides the only ruling machinery for an irresponsible people like the Arguities; the latter, by placing responsibility on the individual allows society a freedom which would degenerate into anarchy without the necessary responsibility. And this is precisely the compromise reached at the end of Les Mouches: Oreste sets the example of self-rule by accepting the responsibility of his freedom to choose.

This shift of motivation in Sartre's Oreste (as contrasted to that which moves Aeschylus') is of utmost importance in discovering the cause of the tragic hero's suffering: is it because of guilt or tragic responsibility? As we have seen, Sartre's Oreste is not motivated by the thought of avenging his father's murder; his motives are not so personal, they have universal validity since they surpass the family vendetta.

Now, in order to accomplish this, an act of violence has



to be executed; and, according to the circumstances, the executor will have to either feel guilt or assume "tragic responsibility" for the act. In Sartre's Oreste the latter becomes true; he will not feel guilt since he acts in good faith and since his motives transcend his personal life as they are oriented toward the people of Argos. Or as Sartre puts it: "A man ... chooses ... for everyone else when he chooses for himself."<sup>76</sup> Thus, Oreste assumes responsibility for his crime. And it is precisely this sense of responsibility which causes his suffering, since it is a source of anguish. As Sartre states again:

L'existentialiste déclare volontiers que l'homme est angoissé. Cela signifie ceci: l'homme qui s'engage et qui se rend compte qu'il est non seulement celui qu'il choisit d'être, mais encore un législateur choisissant en même temps que soi l'humanité entière, ne saurait échapper au sentiment de sa totale et profonde responsabilité.<sup>77</sup>

Thus, Sartre associates responsibility with anguish, and the latter implies suffering. Therefore, Oreste, when he assumes responsibility for his crime, is also assuming the anguish which it implies.

Now, it is taken for granted that tragedy implies suffering, and we have seen that Oreste does suffer in Les Mouches; nevertheless, Kaufmann states that in Les Mouches...





What we are shown on the stage is not the staggering suffering that leads to despair but the young man who triumphs over despair. That is why the play is not a tragedy.<sup>78</sup>

Kaufmann is right in asserting that Oreste triumphs over despair, providing he uses this word in the same sense that Sartre does in his L'Existentialisme:

Quant au désespoir, cette expression a un sens extrêmement simple. Elle veut dire que nous bornerons à compter sur ce qui dépend de notre volonté, ou sur l'ensemble des probabilités qui rendent notre action possible... Au fond, quand Descartes disait: "Se vaincre plutôt soi-même que le monde", il voulait dire la même chose: agir sans espoir.<sup>79.80</sup>

And it is "despair" which could lead, paradoxically enough to a kind of optimism: Oreste's statement that "human life begins on the other side of despair" is, in fact, a positive affirmation of human life. It is in complete accordance with Sartre's idea of existentialism as a humanism, and a very optimistic one at that:

[L'existentialisme] ... ne peut pas être considéré comme ... une description pessimiste de l'homme: il n'y a pas de doctrine plus optimiste, puisque le destin de l'homme est en lui-même.<sup>81</sup>

Thus, Oreste triumphs over despair in the sense that he is willing to act relying on his own self without any hope of assistance from the world.

At the same time, tragedy shows the hero being crushed by suffering, but it goes one step forward and asserts the



positive value of life in the midst of suffering or as

Kaufmann himself quotes from Nietzsche:

Every true tragedy leaves us ... [with] ...  
the metaphysical comfort that life is at the  
bottom of things, despite all the changes of  
appearances, indestructibly powerful and pleas-  
urable.... The profound Hellene, uniquely suscept-  
ible to the tenderest and deepest suffering  
comforts himself, having looked boldly right into  
the terrible destructiveness of so-called world  
history as well as the cruelty of nature...<sup>82</sup>

Thus, Nietzsche concludes by saying that "precisely their  
tragedies prove that the Greeks were not pessimists..."<sup>83</sup>

And neither is Sartre, as he asserts in his essay

L'Existentialisme est un humanisme, and as he proves in Les  
Mouches, a play which brings him close to some aspects of the  
Greek concept of tragedy; Oreste looks boldly into the human  
condition and by so doing he suffers, if not the traditional  
guilt of the self-destroying Greek hero, the equally torturing  
anguish that brings upon a man the responsibility of the act choosing

Then, if it is true that Oreste triumphs over despair by  
relying on nobody or nothing but himself, he faces, and always  
will face -every time that he will find himself in the position  
of a choice- the anguish caused by the responsibility for  
his choice; and this is precisely what Kaufmann seems to have  
missed when he denies Les Mouches the right to tragedy based on  
the suffering of the hero.



Following Hegel's fresh approach to tragedy from a philosophical point of view, Nietzsche analyses the core of the tragic conflict. The two principles he discovers operating in tragedy are here explained in a simplified manner by Calarco:

Nietzsche discerns two formative influences on tragedy in ancient Greece, two artistic and cultural principles -the Apollonian and the Dionysiac.<sup>84</sup>

Calarco summarizes Nietzsche's interpretation of the Apollonian principle: "The dream sphere of Apollonian art is... a realm of 'fair illusion', of 'deep delight'".<sup>85</sup> "Therefore, the Apollonian is associated with balance, order, the avoidance of extremes."<sup>86</sup>

Nietzsche completes the "Apollo's dream sphere": "[The principle of individuation]... has received its most magnificent expression in Apollo."<sup>87</sup>

Now Calarco summarizes Nietzsche's interpretation of the Dionysiac principle, the counterpart of the Apollonian, as a rapture characterized by "the glorious transport which arises in man, ever from the very depth of nature, at the shattering of the principium individuationis..."<sup>88</sup> He notes that in Dionysiac ecstasy "...the boundaries between individuals are shattered, but individuation must itself be shattered to make this possible. Man is united to man, but only in so far as both merge into Oneness, the universal ground of Being."<sup>89</sup>



"Yet" continues Calarco "beneath these visions, and those of the Apollonian state, sits 'truth and its terror'."<sup>90</sup> Thus, both visions the Apollonian and the Dionysiac -the first serene, the second ecstatic- are the illusions man places in front of quotidian reality ("truth and its terror").

Tragedy involves a paradoxical union of opposed illusion whose purpose is to place man beyond naked, unmediated suffering and beyond the despair which he feels when suffering can neither be ignored nor made intelligible in some context larger than the individual experience of pain.<sup>91</sup>

Calarco explains Nietzsche's theory of tragedy: "... as the wedding of the Apollonian and the Dionysiac. Yet the Apollonian weds a realm of 'fair illusion' to the principium individuationis which may, under different circumstances, posit a radical alienation of individual man from the world, together with the despair which proceeds from such alienation. And the Dionysiac shattering of the principle of individuation may become a loss of identity far removed from Dionysiac ecstasy."<sup>92</sup>

In his Tragic Ontology, Calarco establishes a relationship between Nietzsche's Apollonian and Dionysiac principles and Eliade's conception of archaic (an-historical man) and historical man.<sup>93</sup> Eliade's distinction between archaic man and historical man is based on the former's vision of reality through "the myth





of cyclical periodicity or ... the myth of eternal return."<sup>94</sup>

In other words, archaic man sees reality as a repetition of various events in a definite period of time or ad infinitum. This archetype could be best exemplified by the illusion of the solar cycle. The knowledge that historical man possesses is that this double illusive <sup>95</sup> cycle will take place only as long as the sun exists; whereas archaic man fails to see "truth and its terror" beyond this cycle. Once man discovers the awesome fact of the relative sense of permanence implied in the life span of the sun in the background of Time, he can no longer avoid seeing reality as a series of self-contained historical events:

The chief difference between the man of the archaic and traditional societies and the man of the modern societies with their strong imprint of Judaeo-Christianity lies in the fact that the former feels himself indissolubly connected with the Cosmos and the cosmic rythms, whereas the latter insists that he is connected only with history.<sup>96</sup>

The questionability of Les Mouches as tragedy will be answered by seeing to what extent its view of reality is able to fulfil the role of tragedy "...to provide an adequate valorization of the tragic hero's existence and suffering."<sup>97</sup>

Our task now is to analyse Les Mouches in order to show if the Apollonian and Dionysiac principles are present in it, and if so, how do they manifest themselves. Then, we shall



try to establish how reality is seen in the play: through archaic man's vision of protecting himself from history by means of the archetype of repetition, or through the naked vision of history proper of historical man.

A study of the development of the action between Sartre's play and the last two plays of Aeschylus' Oresteia shows that up to the murder of Egisthe and Clytemnestre, the action that takes place in Les Mouches is akin in structure to the action of The Libation Bearers. From the moment Oreste and Electre take refuge in Apollo's temple, the action moves along the same line as it does in The Eumenides; that is, the trial of Oreste. Although, as we shall see, the philosophical implications of this action in Les Mouches are considerably different from those in Aeschylus' play.

Les Mouches begins in Apollonian clarity rather than in Dionysiac darkness; Oreste at the time of his arrival at Argos, is the embodiment of the Apollonian principle of individuation; because it is expressed in his non-attachment with anything or anybody. This extreme individuation makes him long for an attachment with the Argives as the only means of attaining the Dionysiac counter-part of communion into Oneness. Without it the Apollonian principle becomes a perversion of the same: "Without the deep wisdom of Dionysus, the Apollonian may be transformed into superficial rationality -what Nietzsche calls



'esthetic socratism'- a vision of the 'sensible' side of quotidian life."<sup>98</sup>

Thus, the principle of individuation has evolved in Oreste to the extreme where it presents "... a radical alienation... [of him] ...from the world, together with the despair, which proceeds from such alienation."<sup>99</sup>

As we have said, Oreste is seeking the Dionysiac principle of communion as he strives to commit his freedom to the cause of the Arguites. As it comes forth in the play, Oreste's means of attaining any rapport with the Arguites is by committing the double murder. But these murders are just another link in the chain of the archetype or repetition in the House of Atreus: the recurrent murder of a member of this house by close kindred. As we have seen before, Oreste is not motivated to commit his murder by desire to avenge his father's death; rather he is moved to action by his need to commit his freedom to the Arguite's cause. This difference of motivation in Sartre's Oreste allows him to transcend archaic man's view of reality through the archetype of repetition, as Oreste harbors historical man's view of reality as a unique event, or as he makes his own destiny.

It is in the light of Apollo's temple where the so-called "trial" of Oreste takes place. Oreste still preserves his individuality and although he is still striving to attain the Dionysiac principle of communion with men (the Arguites) he sees the futility of attaining the same with nature. Therefore,



disobeying Jupiter's command, he rejects nature.

Then, he steps out from Apollo's temple, and moves toward Dionysiac communion, toward the Arguites who await him on the streets. It is here, as the play closes, that the Apollonian and Dionysiac come momentarily very close. Oreste keeps his individuality avoiding a complete loss of his identity among the Arguites; thus, in Apollonian restraint, he comes in communion with them as he sets them free from tyranny. But, again, he emphasizes individuality, as he says before walking away forever with the responsibility of his act:

Oreste.- ...Je veux être un roi sans terre et  
sans sujets, Adieu, mes hommes...<sup>100</sup>

Thus, if The Eumenides ends in the establishment of the state as the organism destined to preserve the law, substituting the family vendetta, Les Mouches goes one step forward by destroying a corrupted state machinery, and by establishing a new order based in placing the responsibility, for the action, in each individual.

In conclusion, we can give Les Mouches the right to tragedy although we have seen that it cannot be totally fitted into the tragic pattern as conceived by Aristotle, Hegel and Nietzsche. Even if Les Mouches did not adapt itself perfectly to this pattern, we should allow for the fact that, as pointed out by Oscar Mandell,





the idea of tragedy has persisted through the ages:

The tragic idea survived the loss of the gods and it survived the loss of the aristocratic hero. It adapts itself to the thought and the ethos of every age - to the Greek pantheon and the goddess Themis, to Christianity, to feudalism, to sentimental deism, to social humanitarianism, to materialistic skepticism, to communism, to existentialism. The human situation, ... the fundamental irony of existence, which is more important than any creed, subsists behind all creeds. In this light, it will surely seem arbitrary in a critic to draw a line and say "Here tragedy ends".<sup>101</sup>

Let us now see critical material pertinent to La esfinge. Then, we shall focus our attention on Unamuno's own views on the theatre, and specifically on his own commentaries on La esfinge. Then, we shall proceed to analyse La esfinge in the light of Aristotle, Hegel and Nietzsche.

Most critics agree that La esfinge has no theatrical qualities, and that the public will not understand it.

Ilundain in a letter to Unamuno (Paris, January, 1899) tells him that his play will fail to hold the attention of the public because it will not understand Angel, the protagonist.<sup>102</sup> He adds that Angel is a character who rings false, because he is not human.

Juan Barco in a letter to Unamuno (January 10, 1899) states that after reading parts of the play, even though he likes the ideas and the dialogue, he is afraid that because there is not enough emphasis on the technical aspects of the



play, the public will not be satisfied with it.<sup>103</sup>

The actor Thuillier in a letter to Unamuno (Barcelona, June 13, 1899) tells him that even though he "feels" his play, he is afraid it has no theatrical qualities.<sup>104</sup>

Ramón D. Pérez (Letter to Unamuno, Barcelona, June, 1899) says that although the ideas in the scene he feels that the public will not understand the play because the ideas presented in it are too sophisticated.<sup>105</sup>

Ferdinando Carlesi, in his introduction to the Italian translation of La esfinge, says that the play is not theatrical in the usual sense of the word, because it is not a play in which a struggle of passions is presented; instead, he says, it is the tragedy of a soul struggling against the world.<sup>106</sup>

Nevertheless, in spite of opinions such as those of Iris M. Zavala who claims that in general Unamuno never met success as a playwright,<sup>107</sup> the premiere of La esfinge in Las Palmas (February 20, 1909) was a complete succes.

The success of the play can be measured by the reaction of several spectators. Manuel Macías Casanova was struck by the reaction of the public:

No nos acordamos de haber visto en nuestro teatro un silencio tan imponente y respetuoso como el que reinó anoche. Parecía que estábamos en un templo.<sup>108</sup>

Tomás Morales, another eye-witness reports that the public was impressed by its theatrical qualities:



La obra se oyó en medio de un silencio religioso, se aplaudió frenéticamente a la terminación de cada acto, se discutió con calor en los intermedios, todo lo cual deja sentado que la obra es teatral.<sup>109</sup>

Many critics have also remarked on the similarity between La esfinge and Ibsen's play, An Enemy of the People (1882).

Ilundain observes the similarities in style: "Corte ibseniano, con alguna escena que recuerda otra similar de Ibsen."<sup>110</sup>

He, then, compares Angel with the protagonist of An Enemy of the People. He points out that the protagonist of Ibsen's play is well drawn, is human, and, even though he is complex, the public understands him and finds in him something common to all man. Unamuno's protagonist, Angel, on the contrary, is a living paradox, an incongruency.<sup>111</sup>

Juan Barco says of the third act of La esfinge that it resembles somewhat the end of An Enemy of the People.<sup>112</sup> And Manuel Macías Casanova also notes that La esfinge is a play of Ibsenian vision, because in Angel, we see a man who lives torn between experience and faith, in accord with Ibsen's ideas.<sup>113</sup>

Ferdinando Carlesi also agrees that La esfinge reminds us of Ibsen's 'ways' in the theatre, and, hence, it is a play all intensity of thought.<sup>114</sup>

Tomás Morales also sees in La esfinge a resemblance to Ibsen, as he says that Angel "... puede repetir, como corolario de su existir, esta famosa frase del maestro escandinavo: 'Todo lo he buscado en mí mismo, todo ha salido de mi corazón.'"<sup>115</sup>

Another point of agreement among critics is their conception



of Angel as a personification of Unamuno. Ilundain says that Angel is a "fotografía de su autor y creador, y ... que todo lo que dice, piensa y quiere es Miguel de Unamuno quien lo ha querido, pensado y dicho antes."<sup>116</sup> Tomás Morales observes that: "Esta su primera obra dramática, es como un gran monólogo en que el autor hace una exposición de su pensamiento; es todo su yo el que habla por boca del protagonista."<sup>117</sup>

Carlesi objects to those conclusions, although he is willing to state that Angel moves around Unamuno's personal ideas.<sup>118</sup>

Zavala disagrees with Carlesi's objection as she says: "La esfinge, obra de crisis, sí es representativa de Unamuno, de su lucha de siempre. Unamuno nunca aceptará una solución esteticista para sus problemas; Angel tampoco.... No, lo importante es el vitalismo, la religiosidad."<sup>119</sup>

In fact, Zavala sees La esfinge as representative of Unamuno's religious crisis of 1897 which consists in "... la búsqueda de una tercera fe, puente entre la ortodoxia católica y la franca pérdida de la fe producto de su formación filosófica."<sup>120</sup>

Fernando Lázaro states that the central theme in all the theatre of Unamuno is the highly metaphysical concern with the meaning of man's life and the mystery of what lies beyond life.<sup>121</sup> This is Unamuno's own preoccupation as we can see





throughout Del sentimiento trágico de la vida. And since this also is Angel's preoccupation, we can conclude that he is a personification of Unamuno's own metaphysical problems.

On Angel, the protagonist of La esfinge, we have found various commentaries from the critics:

Ilundain states that Angel is a defeated man who has not been able to rid himself from the influence of his past.<sup>122</sup>

Ramón D. Pérez sees in Angel a man who is not understood by his friends, who is considered a traitor by the people because he wants to be free and sincere. Because of this, Pérez finds that Angel is a very human character, and that Unamuno has placed parts of his soul and of everyone's soul in Angel.<sup>123</sup>

Casanova sees Angel as a man without faith, who wants to live precisely on faith; a man who needs an ideal to keep living, and consequently, forges his own ideal as he struggles with his own metaphysical doubt. Finally, he says that Angel triumphs over life because he had an ideal: to search for truth, peace, his happiness, his path. It is true that life "killed" Angel, but "... ya se había colocado él por encima de ella, y así entró dignamente en la muerte, que también es triunfar de la muerte misma."<sup>124</sup>

Carlesi says about Angel that "... su gran herejía contra la religión quijotesca consiste en dejarse dominar por la idea de la muerte. Esta idea de la muerte y de la inutilidad de la



acción, este pensamiento que traba los pasos del viandante en la tierra ..., esta parálisis opuesta al destino y a los deberes del hombre ... mata a éste como entidad social."<sup>125</sup>

For Tilgher, Angel is equated to Stirner's superman; the finite "I" who has made himself center of the universe, whose sole aim is to raise himself to divine omnipotence. But, continues Tilgher ...

la conciencia de la inutilidad y limitación del obrar humano ..., la ... nostalgia inmensa de libertad absoluta, de vida ilimitada, de energía infinita, la devoran y le impiden entregarse a la acción.<sup>126</sup>

Tilgher affirms that in his defeat, the defeat of this "super-hombre stirneriano" moved by and "I" full of pride and wishing to become God--Angel is an anti-Quijote in the sense that...

... aunque ambos buscasen la fama eterna ...en la acción...Angel es la negación de lo que don Quijote afirma, y la religión de la acción infinita, que en el héroe cervantino tiene un símbolo incomparable, está en Angel, condenada, por su egoismo, a la inacción absoluta, que le conducirá, por último a renegar de aquel yo soberbio que buscaba servirse del mundo.<sup>127</sup>

It is pertinent to put forth Ilie's commentary on the similarities and differences between Nietzsche's and Unamuno's ideas on the superman in his relationship to morals.



Ilie begins by stating that "it is in the area of valuation that Unamuno stirs up the most trouble."<sup>128</sup> Since, according to Unamuno, man cannot be sincere as he watches himself as a spectator of his own role in life,<sup>129</sup> "all our ideas, thoughts, and values are fraudulent, because they are conceived during a state of self contemplation."<sup>130</sup> For Unamuno only animals, or the feeble-minded, with their unconscious state of being, are sincere.

Ilie continues: "This psycho-moral problem inevitably brings Nietzsche into the picture."<sup>131</sup> For Nietzsche, as for Unamuno, there seem to be a conflict between "animal health and intellectual sickness."<sup>132</sup> He adds that for Nietzsche:

... superman could come into being only after one essential truth was grasped: that the meaningful core of existence--and the triumph of life--lies in the will to power. Since this vitalistic value is the supreme good, there can be nothing wrong with subverting conventional morality whenever the latter gets in the way. Conversely, no traditional evil value is really immoral if it enhances individual power and the affirmation of the self.... Consequently, all moral systems are the rationalization of the will to power.<sup>133</sup>

Ilie continues by pointing out that even though Unamuno was not an immoralist, his views were as devastating in its psychological analysis as Nietzsche's were in the critique of Christianity.<sup>134</sup> This is precisely why Nietzsche's hostility to Christian ethics alienated Unamuno from him. Nonetheless both Unamuno and Nietzsche regard morals as having a psychological genealogy.<sup>135</sup>



Up to this point Nietzsche's and Unamuno's views on morals are similar, but from here on their views are different: "For Nietzsche, consciousness is an obstacle to the development of the superman because it inhibits his healthy impulses.... On the other hand, Unamuno thought consciousness to be more than just a condition that leads to alienation... for eventually it enables us to reintegrate ourselves in a socially productive way. True enough at the beginning it permits moral ambiguity among the conflicting selves that divide the mind. And, also true, we cannot know whether we are good, because we don't know which of those selves is the real one. But in the end, consciousness begets conscience, and moral conscience is governed by love."<sup>136</sup>

Ilie continues his argument by stating that both Nietzsche and Unamuno held the salvation of mankind as the highest goal of human life. Nietzsche saw in the superman the fulfillment of that condition and this implied a presence of anti-Christian values. The latter was in opposition to Unamuno's views since he did not consider, as Nietzsche did, God as an obstacle in front of the superman...

On the contrary, Unamuno wondered whether God was not really the supreme and absolute Superman. If so, then the superman's aspiration as described by Nietzsche was nothing less than the desire of mortal man to acquire God's immortality. And if this were true, then there is little difference between Unamuno's deepest





wish and Nietzsche's. Both God and superman were the projection of man's image into the infinite.<sup>137</sup>

Carlesi is the only one of all the critics we have studied who considers La esfinge a tragedy:

La tragedia de un alma en lucha con el mundo, que hace, deshace su propia existencia, que desmenuza todas sus ideas y sentimientos y que se redime a sí misma, sin que la grandeza de su propia acción llegue a ser comprendida por cuantos le rodean.<sup>138</sup>

It is noteworthy to mention that virtually all existentialist writers have made use in their works of both Biblical and Pagan myths. Unamuno does not differ, a fact commented on by Ilie:

The role of the Hebrew myth in Unamuno's existentialism is fresh, original, and unique. This role was created in three steps... First, as a psychologist, Unamuno was concerned with the individual as a universal man. Second, as a moralist, he had to modify this view by considering man in a social context, although no specific context was needed. But third, as a social critic, he would now have to deal with Spain as well as the psychology of Spaniards both as individuals and as a collectivity. In handling such complexities, he saw the myths of the Garden of Eden as profoundly symbolic structures.<sup>139</sup>

Let us deal now with Unamuno's own theory on the theatre and see if it applies to La esfinge.



In a few personal letters written by Unamuno, the author reveals his dramatic intentions when he was writing La esfinge. His ideas on the theatre will also be judged in the light of some critics.

In a letter to Angel Ganivet (Salamanca, November 20, 1898), Unamuno speaks of how he visualizes his yet unnamed play:

La lucha de una conciencia entre la atracción de la gloria, de vivir en la historia, de transmitir el nombre a la posteridad, y el encanto de la paz, del sosiego, de vivir en la eternidad. Es un hombre que quiere creer y no pueden obsesionado por la nada de ultratumba, a quien persigue de continuo el espectro de la muerte.<sup>140</sup>

He continues by saying that he is aware of the difficulties involved in presenting a religious drama on a modern stage:

...no sé cómo sentará el sacar a las tablas luchas de la conciencia religiosa, no sacadas desde los tiempos clásicos en que se produce aquel portentoso El condenado por desconfiado.<sup>141</sup>

In a letter to Jiménez Ilundain (December 23, 1898), Unamuno calls his play a "... drama íntimo de conciencia, de índole religiosa."<sup>142</sup>

In another letter to Ilundain (May 24, 1899), Unamuno states that he is not willing to sacrifice what he thinks essential in his play in order to satisfy the public. He adds: "más que hacer dramas para el público, quiero hacer público para los dramas."<sup>143</sup>



In a letter to Gilberto Beccari (December 7, 1908),  
Unamuno makes a resume of La esfinge:

La acción no tiene tiempo ni lugar determinado.  
Trátase de un hombre entregado a una acción  
política revolucionaria..., que vive preso de la  
obsesión del más allá, del misterio de ultratum-  
ba. Esto le lleva a pensar que todo esfuerzo  
humano es inútil si al fin todos nos reducimos  
a polvo, nombre, y abandona su puesto político,  
'se hace anacoreta laico... el día en que estalla  
la revolución, tómanle por un traidor vulgar,  
y le matan.<sup>144</sup>

It is important to note that in a letter to Juan Arzadun  
(November 24, 1909), Unamuno states that his play has brought  
him a considerable amount of money, but he makes very clear  
that he has taken up the theatre, not for greed, but because  
he has things which can only be said through this medium.<sup>145</sup>

Another characteristic of Unamuno's theatre is his concern  
to present in his work a situation common to all man.<sup>146</sup> Thus  
Unamuno is a writer committed to a situation as Sartre will be  
a generation later.

The situation which constitutes the central theme of Una-  
muno's work is brought about by the questions: 'What is the  
sense of our life?', and 'What is there beyond death?'<sup>147</sup>

Unamuno was very much concerned in preserving certain  
aspects of Greek tragedy, as he says in a speech in 1918:

Dentro de la tragedia...he tendido acaso  
por mi profesional familiaridad con los trá-



gicos griegos, a la mayor desnudez posible, suprimiendo todo episodio de pura diversión, todo personaje de mero adorno, toda escena de mera transición o divertimento. Los personajes están reducidos, con una economía que quiere ser artística, al mínimo posible, y el desarrollo de la acción, resultado del choque de pasiones, va por la línea más corta posible.<sup>148</sup>

In addition to his desire to remove all extraneous elements from his theatre, Unamuno also wishes to maintain the climax of the action from the beginning of the play, a method, which prompts the critic Lázaro to say: "Estos dramas se desarrollan en una constante violenta tensión emocional..."<sup>149</sup>

Unamuno was also concerned with the re-creation and modernization of Classical Greek themes;<sup>150</sup> Fedra (1910) is an example. Lázaro makes a very pertinent commentary on Unamuno as a precursor of modern theatre:

Unamuno, solitario y desconocido en sus aventuras dramáticas, se adelantaba así a dos rasgos típicos del teatro posterior. Uno, la simplificación al máximo de los decorados, cuyo adalid fue Jacques Copeau, en su parisino Vieux-Colombier: ese venerable teatro que ha servido de vivero del teatro francés contemporáneo. Otro, la recreación y modernización de los temas trágicos clásicos, a la que deben sus mejores y mas originales éxitos O'Neill, Giraudoux, Anouilh y Sartre.<sup>151</sup>

Another point of similarity between Greek Classical Tragedy and Unamuno's theatre is his conception of the Greek ethos. For Unamuno a man is responsible for his actions regardless of his





intentions. And in his early works, to which La esfinge belongs, Unamuno maintains that "...la intención no vale, sólo el acto".<sup>152</sup>; although, in latter works (i.e., Vida de Don Quijote y Sancho (1905)), he will affirm the contrary: "... lo cardinal para ti es lo que quisieras ser."<sup>153</sup>

In La esfinge, Unamuno has presented a situation which is common to man: a human being facing the question of eternity. Angel wishes to be eternal but, since he has lost his faith in Christianity, he is moved to despair. What Unamuno has done in writing La esfinge is to "commit" his pen in order to present a situation relevant to his and our times of religious crisis.

In accordance with Unamuno's notions on the theatre, La esfinge is a play where the stage settings, the characters (note that only Angel, Tía Ramona and Eufemia are the only completely-drawn characters), and the action are kept as simple as possible. Indeed the play revolves exclusively around Angel's metaphysical problem and its consequences on his private and on his political lives.

La esfinge is also a modernization of a classical Spanish theme: a Christian doubts his faith in God. This same theme was presented by Tirso de Molina in his El condenado por desconfiado (1627-1636).

Keeping in mind the comments on tragedy by Aristotle and Nietzsche in the first section of this Chapter, we are now ready to posit the question: can La esfinge be considered a



tragedy in the light of Aristotle's definition of tragedy?

First of all, let us point out the action which is imitated in this play: Angel, a political leader, withdraws from politics, and retires to a life of meditation which he hopes will bring him peace. He is considered a traitor and is killed.

So much for the external action of the play; now to analyse the internal "action" which takes place in Angel's mind. It becomes evident that it consists of the discovery by Angel of his relationship with himself and with the world.

The reversal of Angel's initial situation, (i.e. his resignation from politics) is in accordance with the law of probability, since Angel's apprehension about the possible non-existence of God and his fear that without God he will not be immortal lead him to come to terms with his metaphysical apprehension. In order for Angel to come to terms with himself, he must abandon politics since he regards it as a trivial game:

Angel.- ... Son ridículas miseriucas de ese juego que llamáis política, para el que hace falta ... sentido de las apariencias; y como carezco de él, he decidido renunciar a tal juego.<sup>154</sup>

But this reversal of the situation from political life to a life of meditation does not completely solve Angel's metaphysical doubts. He begins to have knowledge of where his problem lies, (i.e. he discovers man's fall from innocence) and



the discovery restricts him to a life of inactivity.

We can speak of a second reversal of Angel's situation when the mob comes to lynch him. We find Angel momentarily wishing to engage again in politics:

Angel.- ¡No, a huir no! ¡A ponerme al frente  
de ellos para encauzarlos; a impedir  
mayores males, a morir en la barricada!<sup>155</sup>

But when Felipe reminds Angel of his metaphysical problem:

Felipe.- ¡Sólo Dios salva! ¡El triunfo te  
agrandará la nada!

Angel.- La nada..., la nada..., pero ¿qué he de  
hacer?

Felipe.- Ya te lo he dicho y no me has oído.<sup>156</sup>  
¿Por qué lo quieres saber otra vez?

Angel retreats from any political involvement in the situation and decides to approach the mob as a religious leader. This role had been revealed to him by a random reading of the Bible:

Angel.- ... Quise consultar mi porvenir, y  
una mañana después de purificada mi  
conciencia y puesto de rodillas, abrí  
al azar los Evangelios y puse el dedo  
sobre aquellas palabras que dicen:  
"Id y predicad el Evangelio a todas  
las naciones."<sup>157</sup>

Therefore, there is a third and last reversal of Angel situation for now Angel has discovered his mission:



Angel.- No voy, no, no debo..., no puedo...,  
no quiero ir. Pero sí me asomaré a  
decirles cuatro palabras de corazón,  
¿verdad, Felipe?<sup>158</sup>

The process of recognition takes place as Angel lies dying, having been shot while addressing the mob. Angel discovers that it was his excessive pride which caused all his metaphysical apprehensions:

Angel.- He querido hacer de vosotros, mis  
amigos, un comentario a mí: vosotros  
satélites, y el astro yo...: no he  
querido que os manifestarais... Y  
también vosotros tenéis vuestra alma,  
tan alma como la mía...<sup>159</sup>

And finally he says:

Angel.- ... Con justicia muero...; es el pago  
merecido a mi soberbia...<sup>160</sup>

It is his pride that constitutes Angel's tragic flaw; his feelings of superiority over his fellow men and his thirst for immortality. Angel's pride is the result of knowledge. This is indicated by the use of the Biblical allegory of Adam and Eve. As Angel tells Felipe:

Angel.- Sí, Felipe; quiso el hombre ser Dios,  
conocedor de la ciencia del bien y del  
mal, y así que la hubo probado, conoció  
ante todo, su propia desnudez y se vió  
sujeto al trabajo y al progreso...<sup>161</sup>

Our answer to the original question, "Can La esfinge





be considered a tragedy?" is yes. The basic elements found in Aristotle's concept of tragedy are found in La esfinge: the tragic hero, who, like Angel, is found in a distressful situation, not as a result of vice, but of an error -tragic flaw- in his character.

We can also say that La esfinge is a tragedy, according to Nietzsche's notion that tragedy should leave the audience with an optimistic feeling toward life, for at the end of the play Angel asserts the value of life:

Angel.- Sí, ¡viva la libertad!, que es la vida.<sup>162</sup>

Keeping in mind Hegel's theory of tragedy we shall apply it to La esfinge in order to establish the elements in conflict, whether these elements represent some good in their own right, and what reconciliation is attained between these elements. Then, we shall turn our attention to the suffering of the hero in order to see if it is the result of "guilt" or "tragic responsibility."

As Unamuno himself states the tragic conflict in La esfinge is between earthly glory and celestial glory or immortality. Angel is torn between action (his political life which will ensure him earthly glory, and a place in history) and inaction (the life of meditation to which he finally retires). At the end of the play, he is moved again to action: he addresses the people but this time not as a political leader but as a



religious one. This new type of action in Angel can be taken as the reconciliation between the two forces in conflict. It is what Zavala calls "la tercera fe unamuniana," a faith based in the struggle between the orthodox Christian faith in God, and reason, which denies the existence of God, guarantor of our immortality.<sup>163</sup>

Angel's suffering can be seen as the result of his pride. It is pride which moves him to wish immortality, a god-like attribute. Angel rejects his pride as he says: "... Con justicia muero...; es el pago merecido a mi soberbia..."<sup>164</sup> At the same time that he rejects his pride, he is assuming "tragic responsibility" since, even though he meant well when searching immortality, he feels responsible for the harm he caused others, and thus, accepts the punishment for it: death. In this sense La esfinge revives the Greek ethos of Sophocles, in accordance with Unamuno's views at the time he wrote this play. Or as Zavala puts it: "la intención no vale, sólo el acto."<sup>165</sup>

Thus, we see that La esfinge satisfies Hegel's views on tragedy, since it presents a conflict of two rights leading to a reconciliation of a sort. It also, shows the suffering of the hero as a result of a deed for which he assumes "tragic responsibility".

Let us now turn to Nietzsche's theory of tragedy, keeping in mind the relationship between the Apollonian/Dionysiac principles, and Eliade's archaic/historical man's world view.



We shall see whether the hero sees reality through archaic man's vision, or if he, transcending an archetype, sees reality as history.

The Apollonian principle of individuation is found in Angel as he withdraws from his political (communal) life into a life of meditation. At the same time, the Dionysiac principle acts in Angel as the force that moves him to a fusion of his self with the rest of the universe. Tragedy arises from the conflict between Angel's desire for Dionysiac communion with the universe without shattering his Apollonian principle of individuation.

The archetype involved in this play is the archetype of immortality as it appears in the Christian faith. Angel's doubt in the validity of this archetype brings about a re-evaluation of his religious belief leading to "la tercera fe unamuniana", a faith based on the struggle of man against his doubt in the archetype of immortality.

As Ilundain has pointed out, Angel does not rid himself from the influence of his past - the Christian Faith. He does not transcend the archetype of immortality, since, at the end of the play, he abandons his doubt and wills a return to the Christian God. In this sense, he sees reality, as archaic man does, in the form of myth.

In conclusion, we can give La esfinge the right to tragedy, as we did to Les Mouches, since it lent itself to be analysed



in the light of Aristotle's, Hegel's and Nietzsche's concepts of tragedy.





NOTES TO CHAPTER III

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I would say "tragic responsibility" rather than guilt as Kaufmann himself uses this phrase on p. 210 of this book.

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A.C. Bradley, "Hegel's Theory, of Tragedy," Appendix to Anne and Henry Paolucci, Hegel on Tragedy (New York, 1962), p. 367.

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We are assuming that Sartre is referring to "hope" in others, and not "hope" in oneself; otherwise, we fail to see the parallel between Descartes' aphorism and Sartre's.

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Ibid., pp. 9-10.

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This relationship is not a one-to-one correspondence between the Apollonian principle and historical man, and between the Dionysiac principle and archaic man as it seems at first sight. The correspondence is rather between the Apollonian and Dionysiac with archaic man, since these three terms imply a vision of reality through myth and archetypes as opposed to the vision of it by historical man. Cf., Calarco, pp. 10-11.

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    Zavala, p. 22.



## CONCLUSION





It has been the purpose of the present study to analyse the major themes found in Sartre's Les Mouches and in Unamuno's La esfinge. These themes were the following: the theme of man's inherent freedom to choose his own values and hence determine his own actions, and the theme of man's loss of innocence as he becomes aware of his freedom. Then we compared the way in which each author deals with these themes, searching for their affinities and dissimilarities.

In comparing Sartre's and Unamuno's approach to the theme of freedom, it was found that, in Les Mouches as well as in La esfinge, man is free to choose his own values and his own actions. It was also found that in both plays man's inherent freedom alienates him from the rest of nature, from the unconscious aspect of the universe, and hence, alienation leads to anguish as man encounters himself, other men, and nature itself. The major difference between Sartre's and Unamuno's approach to the theme of freedom is that, in Les Mouches, Oreste refuses to subordinate his freedom to either men or God whereas, in La esfinge, although Angel refuses to take orders from men, he is nevertheless, willing to submit his freedom to God.

As we have seen in previous chapters, the theme of freedom is closely to the theme of man's loss of innocence. Both these themes as they are developed in Les Mouches and in La



esfinge lead to the conclusion that man loses his innocence as he becomes aware of his freedom. Knowledge is considered a disease undermining any hope that man might entertain of communion with the rest of nature. But after this fact is asserted there exists a major difference between Sartre's and Unamuno's attitude toward man's loss of innocence as a result of his freedom. In Les Mouches it is maintained that man is not evil, but free; man cannot be considered evil because of his alienation from the rest of nature since his freedom is believed to be gratuitous; it was given to him without his choosing it. On the other hand, in La esfinge, man is considered evil insofar as he is not willing to give up his freedom to God. Here, the concept of man's freedom is closer to that found in the Biblical account of Adam and Eve: man is made free, but he must subordinate his freedom to God's will.

Another major difference between Les Mouches and La esfinge is that in the former Oreste faces courageously his freedom to choose; whereas in the latter Angel, instead of facing his freedom to choose and the anguish it implies, wishes to return to innocence and to God.

In Chapter III, the question was posited as to whether or not Les Mouches and La esfinge are tragedies. Our answer to this question is that both plays could be considered tragedies inasmuch as they contain many elements encountered



in Aristotle's, Hegel's, and Nietzsche's concepts of tragedy. Of these elements, the one we considered the most important in determining whether a play is or is not a tragedy was the element of optimism with which a tragedy should always leave its audience. Tragedy should assert the value of life even though it presents life as terrible, inflicting suffering on man.

In conclusion, Sartre and Unamuno attempt to deal in Les Mouches and La esfinge with some of the vital problems of man's existence. We could do no less than to agree with Ilie, referring to existentialism in general:

The nature of existentialism is sufficiently diffuse to make questions of influence and chronology immaterial. Its precise definition continues to evade us because many of its characteristics have already appeared in previous intellectual movements... There is little doubt... that existentialism has stated the problem of life and of philosophy in a way that is more personal and conflictive than any other other philosophical position prior to it ... The issues are no longer formulated as, What is man? What are values? What is the nature of the universe? Instead, the existentialist's questions are, Who am I? What do I believe in? What is my relationship to that which is not me?



NOTE TO THE CONCLUSION

Paul Ilie, Unamuno: An Existential View of Self and Society (Madison, 1967), pp. 4-5.





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